



THE
MOUNTAINEER
EASTERN OREGON UNIVERSITY

FALL | WINTER 2019

**ALTRUISM:
THE ART OF
giving**

Alumnus George Thompson, '02, worked closely with Sesame Street muppet Julia to reach people with autism through music. P. 11

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Julia, a muppet with Autism Spectrum Disorder, joined the Sesame Street cast in 2017. Alumnus George Thompson, '02 brought her stories and songs to special education classrooms. Photo credit: Zach Hyman/Sesame Workshop.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



My Dear Fellow Alumni and Friends,

Altruism, giving selflessly to empower one another through inclusiveness, appreciation, and stewardship, is a core value of our EOU community. We are all beneficiaries of this value and it makes for an especially distinctive student experience — an Eastern Edge.

Frequently, I see altruistic service amongst EOU Mountaineers. Meaningful mentorship, creative curricular and extracurricular endeavors, celebrations of individual and community success, and encouragement in the face of challenges bring out the best in us. The meaningful relationships between faculty and students continue to impact our graduates as they experience successful careers and fulfilling lives.

Altruism runs deep at Oregon's Rural University and makes EOU a great place to work and learn. This fall, we welcome two new deans to the faculty: Matt Seimears in the College of Education and Ed Henninger in the College of Business. They join ranks of accomplished faculty and dedicated alumni in each field. As we mark the university's 90th academic year, I look forward to the first stages of construction on the Fieldhouse and reaching our goals to grow the number of lives impacted. New relationships will support a growing number of online and on-campus learners from the region and around the world.

We are committed to cultivating success for our students. We are blessed with a wonderful community of Mountaineers — employees, alumni and friends — and we celebrate this by sharing some of our stories. I look back on my years as an EOU student with gratitude and fondness. Altruistic people elevated my experience as a student and now encourage me as the university's president. I appreciate each of you for helping continue our legacy of altruism into the future.

In gratitude,

Thomas A. Insko, '94
President

President
Thomas A. Insko, '94

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Good to the bone

About one in 430 registered donors gets matched with a recipient and successfully donates bone marrow. EOU Women's Soccer Coach Jake Plocher became one of them last May.

Plocher joined the registry of donors with a cheek swab in 2012 to support a soccer player who helped coordinate the drive on campus. Six years later, he got a phone call that there was a potential match.

The cheek swab collects DNA from donors to assess whether they might be able to provide bone marrow or other needed tissues for patients with blood cancers like leukemia.

"My dad had cancer and was in that situation," Plocher said. "I would hope that if anybody was in a position to help, that they would follow through."

And that's what he did. Additional lab work and blood tests confirmed that the match was viable, then Plocher flew out to Portland, where he received two shots a day for five days to increase the cells in his bone marrow. Extracting the bone marrow took six hours.

"I had a big needle in each arm, and I'm not a big needle person," he said.

Following the procedure, Plocher experienced bone and back aches, flu symptoms and fatigue.

"It was worth doing and I hope anybody who has the opportunity would do it," he said. "I got a little bit nervous, but I wasn't thinking of it as a big deal."

Giving back is an ingrained part of Plocher's paradigm for himself and his soccer players.

"Altruism is something we preach within our program," he said. "We want to help these students become better people to benefit the community here and where they live."

When he came to the women's soccer program in 2017, he found plenty of talent but a lack of focus and team unity. In his first season as head coach, he brought the team together to win the regular season, as well as the Cascade Collegiate Conference tournament, for the first time in program history.

Last fall, the Mounties did it again and progressed to the second round of the NAIA national tournament to finish at No. 14. Their schedule is packed with top-25 teams this fall, and Plocher has his sights set even higher.

"There's been some buzz and momentum after the last couple

Women's soccer coach Jake Plocher spent six hours donating bone marrow after matching with an anonymous recipient.

of years, but every season is completely different,” he said. “I want us to be a cohesive unit and make a run at another conference title.”

New turf in Community Stadium has created an energized playing environment for both men’s and women’s soccer. High-quality facilities pair with Plocher’s recent success to make EOU a tempting offer for new recruits. A large incoming class of freshmen and transfer student-athletes means competition among teammates will be high, which Plocher sees as positive.

“We should be an even deeper team than we were the last two seasons,” he said. “Being right there in the stadium under the lights brings a lot of energy, especially to big time games, and it creates the competitive atmosphere that everyone wants to be a part of.”

Fully recovered from his surreal experience donating bone marrow last spring, Plocher brings common sense altruism to his team.

“It’s just the values that were instilled in my upbringing — I wanted to be able to help someone,” he said. “I don’t know anything about the recipient, and it doesn’t matter if I know them or not. It’s what I hope anybody would do if they were in that situation.” ♦



Senior Josee Bassett plays defender for the Mounties. As a coach, Plocher credits a renewed sense of unity with the team's recent success.

Got volunteers?

In 2018-19, EOU student-athletes volunteered for

6,967
service hours.

Of those,

527

hours were by the women's soccer program.

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Bringing healthcare home

Freshman year got off to a rough start for Andrea Camacho, now a junior studying Health and Human Performance at Eastern Oregon University.

The first year away from her island home in Saipan was full of difficult transitions.

"I had never been away from island life, and the transition to American living was overwhelming," Camacho said. "I come from a very low-income home — poverty-stricken, really."

Culture shock soon led to depression, but staff from TRIO Student Support Services, the EOU Counseling Center and the Multicultural Center reached out and made sure Camacho had the resources she needed to be successful.

Since then, she's become dedicated to developing public health systems in her own community.

"Mental health isn't really talked about in the islands," Camacho said. "I had never had access to counseling before, but then I realized how all the aspects of health — mental, spiritual and physical all work together."

In 2018 she received a grant from the United Health Foundation's (UHF) Asian Pacific Islanders Fund that will help finance the rest of her bachelor's degree. Scholarship recipients from across the country were invited to attend the annual UHF Diverse Scholars Forum.

Camacho represented EOU at the three-day conference last spring in Washington, D.C., where she discussed a range of contemporary healthcare issues with undergraduate, graduate and doctoral students. Scholars met with policymakers and thought leaders, networked with peers and guest speakers, and shared their own ideas and experiences.

"The conference taught me the importance of staying compassionate and humble while keeping your confidence," Camacho said.

With a minor in psychology, Camacho said she hopes to build a career in public health policy.

"I want to go back to my island and help my people," she said. "We need to combat obesity, preventable diseases, and addiction, and to provide safe spaces for youth that are encountering mental health issues."

She's considering starting a nonprofit that would provide holistic health for indigenous people, such as nutrition education.

"It is hard in the islands," Camacho said. "People vacation where



Andrea Camacho received a grant from the United Health Fund and represented EOU at the organization's Diverse Scholars Forum in Washington, D.C.

we live, but they don't see deeper into the poverty and struggle that are part of the community."

She served as ASEOU's Director for Political Affairs in 2018-19, and learned about the policies that shape the region, as well as the university community. This year, she's the ASEOU Director for Diversity and Equity, representing minority groups on campus.

"I'm narrowing down what I'm passionate about," Camacho said.

"I enjoyed working to find solutions to issues, and encouraging students to engage in politics because it affects us all."

From her first experience living in a two-story building, to finding mentors on campus, Camacho has built a vision of her future during the last couple of years at EOU. She said staff in TRIO

and Student Affairs provided advice and support that kept her committed to her education.

"People from EOU have really helped me grow as an individual and form how I want my life to look five years from now," she said.

Looking forward, Camacho said she feels prepared for the challenge of bringing healthcare services to some of the most isolated communities in the Northern Mariana Islands.

"Healthcare providers put themselves through so much work and sacrifice to keep giving back and that's beautiful to me," she said.

"The world is hard enough, we need to come together to make it better for everyone." ♦

"I want to go back to my island
and help my people."
—Andrea Camacho



David Panuelo, '87, was sworn in as President of Micronesia in May.

A President from Pohnpei

David Panuelo, '87, was sworn in as the ninth president of the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) in May 2019.

Islanders make up a growing number of EOU students and alumni. Long-standing connections between EOU and Pacific Islanders have expanded through word-of-mouth and ongoing recruitment efforts.

Located in the Pacific Ocean, north of Australia and west of Hawaii, the FSM is a sovereign nation of four island states, with 17 native languages and dialects. The United States and the FSM have an enduring partnership codified through the Compact of Free Association, which allows FSM citizens to work and study in the U.S. without a visa. At his August 5 meeting with U.S. Secretary of State Michael Pompeo, Panuelo reaffirmed that the United States is the FSM's "first and foremost ally."

During the FSM elections in March, Panuelo unseated fellow Pohnpeian and former

President Peter Christian as the at-large senator for Pohnpei. In May, the FSM Congress selected Panuelo as president from the four at-large senators from each of the island states: Kosrae, Chuuk, Yap and Pohnpei.

After earning his degree in political science from EOU, Panuelo returned home to Pohnpei where he began his career in the FSM Department of Foreign Affairs. He served as a department director in Pohnpei, and then returned to Foreign Affairs as assistant secretary for the Division of American and European Affairs. Two years later, he entered the private sector and established a construction company, a human services company and the nonprofit Care Micronesia Foundation.

In 2011, he was elected Pohnpei state senator and served in that office until his election to the at-large seat in March.

Prominent alumni like Panuelo, as well as counselors and advisors, keep the relationship between our communities thriving. ♦

Get to know Micronesia

Test your knowledge of this island nation!

Get to know the Federated States of Micronesia!

1. There are four island states, but how many individual islands are in the FSM?

- A. 35
- B. 252
- C. 607
- D. 812

2. About how many people live in the FSM's 271 square miles of land area?

- A. 100,000
- B. 50,000
- C. 10,000
- D. 5,000

3. David Panuelo, '87, is from Pohnpei, the largest island in the FSM and home of the capital city. Pohnpei is about the size of...

- A. Rhode Island
- B. Portland metro area
- C. Union County
- D. EOU Campus

Sources: worldatlas.com, fsmgov.org

Answers: 1. C, there are 607 islands spread across 1,700 miles of the Caroline Islands archipelago where the FSM lies. 2. A, more than 105,000 people call the FSM home. 3. B, Pohnpei is 117 square miles and the Portland metro area is 145 square miles.



One man's trash

By Katy Nesbitt

Luke Dynes, '02, is the poster child for the self-made business executive — but his work goes beyond his success in agriculture.

Dynes moved to Eastern Oregon as a teenager from Danville, Illinois. He attended Hermiston High School and spent summers in Elgin. Motivated to get an education and gifted with a strong work ethic, Dynes attended EOU and Oregon State University's agricultural science program on the La Grande campus and graduated with an Agriculture Resource Economics degree. He was in business for himself shortly after graduation, harvesting crop byproducts in the Columbia River Basin under the name Pacific Ag.

"We would go in and buy, bale and market byproducts off the farm," Dynes said.

Grass seed is a big commodity in northeastern Oregon, but after it's cut, straw remains. Pacific Ag harvested and marketed straw, as well as residual stalks from peas or beans, and baled them for dairy herd feed.

After almost 10 years Dynes sold Pacific Ag and started Wyatt Enterprises, a company that repurposes byproducts from processing plants such as sweet corn silage, off-grade peas, onions, carrots, potatoes and blueberries and the residual plant matter from wine grape production.

After his mother passed away Dynes took on the added challenge of helping raise five of his 13 siblings. Those siblings he didn't help raise have since become felons, which he said created the soft place in his heart for the inmates on work release he hires.



Luke Dynes, '02, and his staff work with wineries, food processing plants, and farmers to recycle agricultural waste.

“We do hire a lot of people out of work release,” Dynes said. “They are not necessarily bad people at heart. Sometimes they just need direction and guidance to become very productive contributors to society.”

Sometimes staying on the straight and narrow doesn't work out, Dynes admitted, but in 20 years he said he has witnessed three success stories of employees who completely turned their lives around.

“That's my way of giving back for the help I got when I was in need,” Dynes said.

Most of what Wyatt Enterprises collects from the processors is made into feed ingredients for dairy and beef cattle, chickens and dogs.

Dynes said, “Some of the byproduct we deliver directly to customers, the rest we take to our dehydrating facilities and manage it in a dry form.”

Before Pacific Ag and Wyatt Enterprises, a lot of crop waste went straight to a feedlot, compost yard or the dump when handling it became a problem for a farmer. Dynes said there was a real need to start a business in managing the material.

“Piece by piece we structured our business model and it created an industry,” Dynes said.

As food processing increased in the Columbia Basin, it pushed all of the agriculture services like his to step up and become better.

Dynes said, “We are just one piece of the puzzle.”

“You can make a difference — and it's the littlest things that make the biggest difference.”
— Luke Dynes, '02

His goal in building up these companies was to reduce the number of tons of fruits and vegetables taken to the landfill — without any cost to the suppliers.

“I think recycling in all aspects is more successful if it doesn't cost the person producing the material to recycle,” Dynes said. “I believe that we can develop beneficial secondary uses for all of these agricultural products one way or another.”

Dynes said he believes all private businesses benefit from recycling and reducing waste, which is easily demonstrated in agriculture. He said cows, for instance, recycle

large volumes of crop byproduct, leaving behind manure that can fertilize crops, all while producing food for humans and pets.

“I personally believe the most viable businesses that help reduce the footprint are the dairies and feeders that are using by-products instead of contemporary purpose-grown crops,” Dynes said.

He's been involved in agriculture from a very young age, and attended his first year at Blue Mountain Community College on an FFA scholarship. After his freshman year he attended both Blue Mountain and Eastern Oregon University on full-ride academic scholarships, graduating with a 3.9 grade point average while continuing to work full-time at a number of agriculture-related jobs.

His success in school and business is striking in contrast to the life of poverty, neglect and abuse he was raised in until almost 15. When he had no support from his own parents, a friend's family took him in to their home.

“They taught me how to work, be responsible, and no matter what, they taught me that you can make a difference — and it's the littlest things that make the biggest difference,” Dynes said. ♦



Megan Brown quit her waitressing job to earn a degree and provide for her son. An EOU Foundation Crisis Award kept her on track to graduate in 2020.

Comfort in crisis

EOU Foundation funds keep students enrolled through life's challenges

Last year alone, 27 students benefited from EOU Foundation Crisis Awards. The funds support online and on-campus students who find themselves in difficult situations, where medical expenses, car trouble or childcare costs could threaten their progress toward earning a degree. These private funds close the gap to keep students on track, and, alongside other student services, support them on the way to timely graduation.

Higher education was never part of Megan Brown's plan for her life. Her parents hadn't gone to college, and she followed them into the working world right after high school. But after seven years of working double-shifts as a waitress to support her young son, Brown decided to make a change.

"I got fed up and quit one day," she said.

Brown did odd jobs and worked harvest for a year, but after being turned down for more professional positions because she didn't have a degree, she enrolled at Eastern Oregon University.

Now in her senior year, Brown is determined to complete her business degree a year early and graduate in June 2020. She hopes a minor in communication and concentrations in marketing and management will equip her to promote athletics teams or work in a sports information office.

A little over a year ago, Brown's dream was almost derailed. She

was three terms into her education as a first-generation student, working two jobs and attending classes full-time.

"Things got really tight," she said. "My son has health issues, including asthma and allergies, and I'd been trying to make every penny stretch. I have a lot of pride. I've worked since I was 15, I moved out on my own at 17. It's really hard for me to ask for help."

Brown talked to Scholarship Coordinator Danny Bailey, who directed her to the Crisis Awards through the EOU Foundation.

"I wrote my letter, and I didn't expect anything," she said, but hardship funds opened her eyes to the generosity of the EOU community. "It showed me that people are out there to help, and they recognize that things happen. It's really nice to know that there are people who want to help. I would love to thank that donor, to say how much it helped my family."

At 33, Brown is a non-traditional on-campus student, and she hopes to bridge the gap for single parents and older students who need some inspiration. She's getting her career jump-started as the sports information director's intern this year at EOU.

"I never saw myself going to college, especially in my 30s," she said. "Getting the EOU Foundation Crisis Award has kept me on track, and I hope that one day I can be in a financial situation where I could help someone like me."

By Vicky Hart

EOU Foundation Crisis Awards in 2018-19

\$10,891

awarded from EOU Foundation

\$200-\$500

given to each recipient, on average

27

students received support from Crisis Awards

More than 2,000 miles separated Tanisha Willis from her family in Fort Benning, Georgia when she moved to La Grande in 2017.

She'd spent about two years in Texas, working and taking classes full-time. Eventually the strain of 80-hour weeks became too much and her mental health suffered. After a brief return home, Willis followed her partner to Eastern Oregon University and enrolled as a junior, bringing credits from four prior institutions.

After stints in the medical field and other careers, Willis found inspiration in EOU's art facilities and embraced her passion for creating.

"I've always loved art, but my family didn't want me to become a 'starving artist,'" she said. "Art 101 was a turning point for me. It got me thinking about art in a different way and really opened my eyes to contemporary art."

For a class project, she made a cardboard box with an infinity mirror in it to communicate big ideas about modern issues.

"It was the most ambitious thing I'd attempted and I was really impressed with what I was able to create," Willis said.

Meanwhile, though, her relationship and mental health were deteriorating. Willis reached out to Mike Williams in the TRIO Student Support Services office, and he connected her with emergency housing in the residence halls, as well as counseling services.

Williams also referred her to Financial Aid staff to learn more about her eligibility for a Crisis Award. When the relationship broke down and Willis lost her housing, she also lost some of her belongings.

"I had one blanket and a pillow when I moved to the residence hall," she said. "I used the Crisis Award for a comforter, groceries, towels and soap. It made me feel good that there was someone I could go to for help getting those items that make you feel human."

As President of the Gender and Sexuality Resource Center and Vice President of Art Club, Willis said she tries to do her part to create inclusive, welcoming communities on campus.

"As a student of color, it's hard to accept that if you want to affect change you have to be brave enough to participate, to put your foot in and go to those places you feel out of place," she said. "But nothing would've changed if I had just stayed home all the time."



When Tanisha Willis lost her housing and moved into the residence halls, an EOU Foundation Crisis Award helped her make the new space a home.

She's set her focus on print media and plans to graduate in March 2020. Coming from metropolitan areas in the opposite corner of the country, Willis said she's become more open to rural communities during her time at EOU.

"The world we live in is a harsh one, I don't think we should make it worse," she said. "It's important to be kind and help one another." ♦

Learn more about how you can support students today at eou.edu/foundation today!



Finding her way

Adjunct vocal instructor Jamie Jacobson walked 500 miles over 40 days this summer, following the ancient Camino de Santiago through northern Spain. She said the physical, mental and spiritual challenges and triumphs of the camino equipped her to better guide aspiring musicians.



Learn more about her experience @theWAYtoJamie2019 on Facebook.

5 Things I'm bringing with me

- 1. Fear:** of the unknown and unplanned (like not having a bed, unsavory characters, and injury). I don't want fear to keep me tied up in my life, but I cannot deny its existence. So I will lean in to what's uncomfortable while relying on my common sense to keep me safe.
- 2. Gear:** limited and cultivated gear that weighs 14 pounds in a bright red pack that feels like it was made for me! I have two sets of clothing, three pairs of socks, foot care, shower products, guidebook, journal, water bottles, hiking poles, sandals, a sleeping bag liner, travel pillow and a stone from home to leave along the path at the Cruz de Ferro.
- 3. My village:** my family and friends who support this endeavor are coming with me both in my heart and as represented by a scallop

shell I will carry on my pack. I couldn't do this without the support of my village, especially my husband Sam and my son Ethan.

4. An open heart: I'm ready for whatever lessons the camino has to offer while I'm on this journey. I am ready to meet new people from all walks and areas of life, endure physical pain and emotional and mental struggles as I push my body and mind to new heights.

5. My trusty adventure hat and tons of sunscreen: it's the middle of summer in Spain and there's a heatwave all over Europe. I'll need my wide brim hat to help keep me cool and protected from the sun. I'm going to use a sunscreen stick to avoid coming home with just one half of my body kissed by the sun from only walking westward.



5 Things I'm bringing home

- 1. Understanding** of the importance of human connection, and the knowledge that every interaction is impactful no matter how brief. Sometimes goodbye means see you later and sometimes see you later means goodbye.
- 2. The idea that we cannot teach or be taught.** We can only put ourselves (and our students) in situations to allow for learning. I was taught to count to at least 10 in every language I encountered.

3. An ingrained knowledge of what 31°C and 28k feel like without needing to convert them.

4. Grounded confidence in myself and a new understanding of fear.

5. The ability to wash my clothes, hair and body with only one bar of soap in a cold shower that is just big enough to turn around in.

FROM THE BEAT TO THE STREET

The world met Julia in April 2017, when one of Sesame Street's newest muppets joined the cast as a 4-year-old with short red hair, green eyes and autism.

As her puppet peers learned to interact with Julia through art, so did young viewers and their parents. EOU alumnus George Thompson, '02, had met her prior to the on-air debut. He collaborated with the Sesame Street Autism Initiative to share the impact of music and drumming with special needs populations.

By that time, Thompson had spent nearly a decade teaching children and adults with developmental disabilities. Thompson earned degrees in anthropology and sociology at EOU, but music was always his passion. After producing two albums in New York City, he sought out a higher purpose. A trained social worker, Thompson taught in Ecuador, Thailand, Bulgaria and Korea before returning to the U.S. for a job at TERI Inc. in California.

Thompson joined the nonprofit as its Music and Performance Arts Director. TERI, an acronym for Training, Education, Research, Innovation, serves individuals with autism and other developmental disabilities.

As he began teaching music in special education classrooms, Thompson realized traditional music instruction and instruments weren't reaching all of his students.

"I was making an impact, but I was extremely discouraged," he said.

One of his students was a young man with autism named Chris, who was severely limited in speech and interpersonal communication.

"When I first met Chris he could only verbalize yes and no," Thompson said. "He was reluctant to participate in group music classes, often plugging his ears, jumping and flapping his hands during lessons."

One morning Chris got to school early and Thompson sat down at the piano to teach him a few chords, but within seconds Chris began jumping, flapping and running around the room. A few days later, Chris arrived early again.

Continued on next page.





"Drums are the easiest access point for people. We function in rhythm naturally through breathing, talking, heartbeats, you name it."
- George Thompson, '02

"He sat down at the piano with me and played the three chords I had only showed him once," Thompson said. "It opened my eyes to how the human mind works, and that through music you can reach people who seem unreachable."

Chris later learned to read and write through music, performed Mozart, and played with Grammy-winning artists on stage.

"He was a catalyst for me," Thompson said. "I had to step completely out of the box and create individualized and unique approaches for every student to revolutionize music-making for fun, health and wellness."

Thompson began developing lesson plans to improve social skills, behavior and self-confidence through music. He cultivated partnerships with manufacturers and suggested modifications to guitars, drums, pianos and other musical instruments to make them more accessible.

Soon Thompson was a highly sought-after speaker worldwide. Collaborations with Taylor Guitars, Lennie

Fuzzy Rankins, Michelle Williams and Jason Mraz followed his success.

FINDING THE RHYTHM

During his nine years at TERI, he worked with 30 manufacturers on specialized musical instruments, but his relationship with Remo, Inc. and drums led to a newfound passion for percussion. Although his primary instrument is guitar, Thompson used drums frequently in classrooms.

"Drums are the easiest access point for people," he said. "We function in rhythm naturally through breathing, talking, heartbeats, you name it."

But the drums he'd found were disappointing. They required constant tuning, the membrane of the drumheads was difficult to clean, and the tones were often bothersome to sensory-sensitive

George Thompson, '02, spent time on the Sesame Street set getting to know Julia and other muppets like Cookie Monster. Submitted photos.

students. He shared his concerns and ideas at Remo's booth during a trade show, and got an invitation to meet the company's owner, Remo Belli.

He soon learned that Remo had already begun to develop specialized technology to address these and other issues. Thompson worked with Remo staff for two years to test and refine the new drums.

In 2015, Remo Inc. released Comfort Sound Technology, a drum-head designed to deliver a unique quality of sound by suppressing high-frequency overtones. The focused low frequencies provide a comfortable sound that is ideal for sound-restrictive environments such as hospitals or classrooms, and for working with individuals who find regular drums over-stimulating and too loud.

At just 31 Hertz, the vibrational, tactile tones of the massive 40-inch table drum allow profoundly deaf students to feel the beat. The large drum table set-up also promotes socialization for students who have a hard time making eye contact.

TAKING IT TO THE STREET

Remo signed Thompson as a health and wellness educational artist, and sent him on the road to promote the line of adaptive drums and accompanying videos and lesson plans. Through this new role, he connected with Sesame Street as they were preparing to debut Julia. He worked with Sesa-

me Street to share the new curriculum and grant drums to schools and organizations across the U.S.

"It was so exciting to have Sesame Street involved because of their umbrella to reach so many schools and families," Thompson said. "So much of the problem is that services and resources for people with autism are segmented across a number of disconnected organizations."

Sesame Street's broad appeal has helped relieve the stigma around autism over the past several years. Although one in 68 children are diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), understanding and acceptance remains varied.

Thompson also worked with his students at TERI to promote the Sesame Street and Autism initiative. The TERI Band learned "The Amazing Song," and incorporated it into their educational outreach. The band performed the song and provided "Amazing 1, 2, 3" books to grade schools throughout San Diego County. Sesame Street even featured the group's performances on its website and social media platforms.

BRINGING IT HOME

After nearly 20 years away from home, Thompson returned to the Grande Ronde Valley with his wife to buy a house in Cove near his mom. He said he felt a call to use his expertise to serve people in need in his hometown. His new role as a member of the administrative council at the Center for Human Development (CHD) in La Grande has afforded Thompson the opportunity to do just that.

"I hope to address stigmas around mental health and developmental disabilities that still persist in my home community," Thompson said. "I want to improve accessibility and promote services that are available here." ♦



By Vicky Hart



Findin throug

Pauci-immune necrotizing glomerulonephritis: 15 syllables that changed Tara Fox's, '18, life when she was diagnosed with the kidney disease as a sophomore in high school.

The chronic disease means she'll need an organ donor eventually, and bi-annual chemotherapy treatments to keep it at bay in the meantime. She said her kidneys have been functioning at about 25% since 2013.

"You'd look at me and never know I was sick," said Fox, now a teacher in Athena, Oregon.

Fox said she struggled with her health through high school, then the disease went into remission. She enrolled at Blue Mountain Community College in 2011, determined to earn her associate degree and transfer to EOU's education program. But Fox's health took a turn in winter 2013, so she went in for testing and doctors realized her kidneys were failing.

"The kidney disease is a big part of my life," she said. "I could have easily given up a long time ago, but teaching is something I've always wanted to do. In our second grade time capsule, I wrote that I wanted to be a teacher."

So she took a year off from her education in 2013-14 to undergo treatments, and worked in the same elementary school classrooms she'd grown up in since kindergarten.

"Most of my co-workers were past teach-

ng strength gh teaching

ers, and they understood my disease,” she said. “But being an [instructional assistant] isn’t teaching. I didn’t have my own classroom.”

By 2016, she enrolled at EOU as an onsite student at the regional center in Pendleton. Fox received three scholarships from the P.E.O. chapter in Milton-Freewater, one of which was the largest amount the group had ever awarded.

“My mom went back to college when I was in high school, and she got a scholarship from them, too,” Fox said.

She attended some classes online, steadily making progress toward her degree while living at home in Athena and working at the elementary school there.

“My disease has made me stronger,” Fox said. “It’s taught me a lot about life. I deal with it every day, but doesn’t hinder me from doing what I want to do.”

Fox’s commitment to her goal was tested when it looked like the onsite program in Pendleton might no longer be available, but two EOU instructors from the main campus travelled to the regional center to provide onsite classes for the remainder of the academic year.

“One of the reasons I chose EOU was for the onsite program,” Fox said. “It couldn’t have been more perfect for my needs.”

As Fox entered her senior year, two new instructors signed on to teach classes in Pendleton for the year.

“They drove over from La Grande twice a week so we could finish the degree there in Pendleton,” Fox said. “The two instructors couldn’t have been more amazing. They shared life experience and taught us what we needed to know to do the day-to-day work of being teachers. Their sacrifice and EOU’s commitment to us was amazing.”

From starting at Athena as a temporary substitute, Fox recently joined the staff as a full-time teacher. Now, she’s enrolled in EOU’s

master’s degree program to earn an endorsement for special education. She said her time in a life skills classroom as an instructional assistant got her interested in the field

“It’s one of the most rewarding jobs, and also one of the most difficult,” she said. “I feel like there’s so much to celebrate in special education classrooms — you celebrate every little achievement.”

Fox’s own persistence is on display as she proves herself in everyday tasks against her disease. She said the primary symptoms are

exhaustion and fatigue, which she combats with coffee and daily naps. Fox also has to be careful about eating too much salt or protein. Regular medications and doctor appointments keep her kidneys in check.

“I still travel, work out, live my life,” Fox said. “Even though it took me twice as long as the average student, I just didn’t quit and kept going.”

Many of the lessons she teaches in special education, elementary and high school classes communicate values about the adult world, Fox said. She especially encourages her students to be kind to others and give everyone a chance regardless of their backgrounds.

“In today’s world, the playing field is not always equal,” she said. “I teach in my classroom that we don’t say negative things about anyone else. I really emphasize for my kids to do their best, even if it’s different from the best that the kid next to them could do.”

Skills like making eye contact and saying, “Hello,” are a big part of her approach. She urges students to reach out to a classmate they know is lonely or struggling. Her students learn to hold the door for others, and to say, “thank you,” when someone holds it for them.

“I try to show the kids that what they’re learning in the classroom we’re still struggling with as adults,” she said. ♦

“I could have easily given up a long time ago, but teaching is something I’ve always wanted to do. In our second grade time capsule, I wrote that I wanted to be a teacher.”
- Tara Fox, '18

By Vicky Hart



TJ Presley, '17, got a big surprise last June when he won Intermountain Teacher of the Year. His 3-year-old son ran onto the floor during a pep assembly with a fistful of balloons.

From boardroom to classroom



When TJ Presley, '17, left a full-time management position to earn a Master of Arts in Teaching from Eastern Oregon University, he brought corporate experiences and values with him.

Presley started teaching algebra and junior high math in Pilot Rock, and toward the end of his first year he also became athletic director at Pilot Rock High School.

Between time in the classroom and overseeing the school's sports programs, Presley gets to know all of the students. Pilot Rock boasts about 20 students in each graduating class, and Presley said he's interested in more than their math skills or their ability on the field.

"Part of being a teacher is making sure kids know their responsibilities," Presley said. "I'm teaching math but I spend a great deal of time teaching life skills."

Presley listed punctuality, meeting deadlines, organization and preparedness as some of the skills he folds into his lessons. He said he encourages a safe environment for all students in the classroom, teaching work ethic and teamwork through cooperative learning.

After less than two years in his new field, Presley was nominated for Teacher of the Year. At the end of the 2018-19 school year, while Presley was officiating a pep assembly for Pilot Rock's three state track meet qualifiers, school officials announced the good news.

"It was a big send-off, the band was playing — when the principal and superintendent came out and took the mic from me."

A big banner was unfurled, naming Presley Teacher of the Year for Oregon's InterMountain Region, and his 3-year-old son Benson ran onto the floor with a fistful of balloons.

Presley may never know who nominated him, but perhaps whoever it was noticed some of the little things he does — like make connections for high school seniors seeking internships or perhaps it was the college and university banners hanging in his classroom, donated from schools around the country, to encourage seventh and eighth

grade students to start thinking about higher education.

Presley said, "I want to present opportunities to kids so they know they are out there."

The InterMountain Region covers Morrow, Umatilla, Baker and Union counties, employing more than 200 educators. In 2018-19, Oregon recognized a Regional Teacher of the Year from each of its 19 educational service districts. This fall, statewide administrators selected the Oregon Teacher of the Year from those regional winners.

As a regional awardee, Presley received \$500 through the state Department of Education's partnership with the Oregon Lottery.

An Ontario High School graduate, Presley attended Western Oregon University and played on the baseball team. He graduated with a business degree and started a career in finance that took him to

three Fortune 500 companies, and eventually to a management position with Walmart where he oversaw eight managers and up to 200 employees.

Based in Pendleton, Presley became an assistant baseball coach at the high school and soon found working with students more rewarding than his day job.

"I'm just a manager in the business world, but my relationships with students are different —

making an impact on their young lives is more special and significant," he said.

Years of coaching baseball, along with his corporate finance and management responsibilities, led Presley to take his expertise to the classroom.

"All through coaching baseball some of my mentors encouraged me to pursue teaching because they saw how much I loved working with kids," he said.

Through online courses in school administration, Presley is already making plans to combine his careers in even more meaningful ways.

"I don't know in what capacity I would use my administrative credentials, but I will definitely be in education for the long haul," he said. ♦

"I'm just a manager in the business world, but my relationships with students are different — making an impact on their young lives is more special and significant."

- TJ Presley, '17



PR training courses, like this one hosted by TRACCS, get young people involved in the growing industry of creative communicators.

Building community through business

By Vicky Hart

Public relations was a developing industry in the Middle East and Northern Africa when Mohamed Al Ayed, '91, returned home to Saudi Arabia in the early 1990s.

His modern languages degree from Eastern Oregon University (then Eastern Oregon State College) soon translated into an expertise in communications of all kinds, and Al Ayed founded Trans-Arabian Creative Communications (TRACCS) in 1998.

He has served as president and CEO of the company for nearly two decades. The first of its kind in the country and now the largest in that part of the world, TRACCS employs 275 professionals across 13 countries.

"We founded TRACCS with one simple goal in mind — build an indigenous Arab public relations industry that is from the region and for the region," Al Ayed said. "Today, I can say with a great sense of pride that TRACCS is the only public relations practice with a sustained commitment to nurturing the talent of young communicators across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. In

fact, we are home to the largest pool of Arabic-speaking PR professionals within the global industry, with 85% of our colleagues being native Arabic speakers."

Their clients include government, corporate and multinational organizations that make the most of a

"TRACCS is the only public relations practice with a sustained commitment to nurturing the talent of young communicators across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region."

— Mohamed Al Ayed, '91

long list of public relations services.

"Our passion for communicating with a purpose has allowed us to deliver some great work for our clients, which has also garnered industry recognition on multiple occasions," Al Ayed said.

The TRACCS team has earned more than 75 international awards and continues to climb the ranks of The Holmes Report's annual list of Top

250 Public Relations Firms in the world. The only MENA-based communications firm on the prestigious list, TRACCS currently ranks No. 113.

Al Ayed said his time at EOU was instrumental in both preparing him for his career and shaping his personal growth and development.

“I truly believe [EOU] has been a real launch pad for my journey, which began with being a student, then an employee in the corporate world, then an entrepreneur and the founder of TRACCS, and growing it to where it is today,” he said. “Beyond the quality education and overall university experience that EOU provided me, I cherish some of the best moments of my life with many special people, some of whom I am still in contact with today.”

Giving back is ingrained in Al Ayed’s cultural values, and he said making a difference in his community comes with its own sense of fulfillment. To that end, he’s established a series of programs focused on empowering rising communicators and entrepreneurs.

The Jeddah Entrepreneurs Meet and Competition brings together business know-how, hands-on experience and seed money for women entrepreneurs in Saudi Arabia. Participants present innovative business ideas or existing businesses within three categories: social entrepreneurship, manufacturing and production, and educational and lifestyle development.

In return, they receive access to resources to grow their businesses.

Another initiative, called “Driver’s Seat,” is an award-winning educational program that teaches university students the importance and value of public relations as a strategic business tool. The program shows students how effective communications can be used to engage and influence audiences, and steer companies to success. The one-day workshop was launched in 2013 and built around key exercises, such as role playing and simulation of the PR function within an organization.

“We launched the program to further our commitment to building the public relations industry in the region by fostering and nurturing regional communications talent,” Al Ayed said. “TRACCS rolled out its inaugural Driver’s Seat workshop at King Abdulaziz University, and has since successfully organized this program across various educational institutions in the region.”

To date, more than 700 students have attended the event. TRACCS also runs a host of internships and co-op programs.

“Success cannot be measured in achievements only,” Al Ayed said. “It needs to be anchored to a sense of purpose, maturity and spirit, which I believe form the essence of a truly successful individual.” ♦



Mohamed Al Ayed, '91, founded Trans-Arabian Creative Communications and expanded the role of public relations professionals in the Middle East and North Africa.

EOU alum says "Yes, and..."



Improvisation comedy relies on a central principle called “yes, and...” that dictates participants respond to new ideas or actions from their peers with the phrase, “yes, and...”

Two actors are pantomiming a dinner scene when another walks on stage and asks whether his pet skunk is welcome in the restaurant. One of the diners reaches in his pocket and says, “Yes, and he’ll get along great with my new pet tarantula!”

Christopher Plummer, ’02, spent time in Chicago’s famous improv schools after he left Eastern Oregon University with a theatre degree, but he said the “yes, and” rule meant even more when he returned home to Ontario, where he’d grown up and earned his associate degree before transferring to EOU.

“I had the highest of highs and lowest of lows in my life after moving home to Ontario,” he said. “Ontario had been a ‘no, but’ place in the past — my goal is to make it a ‘yes, and’ town.”

Shortly after moving home to live with his grandmother, Plummer started dating a man who became controlling. The two broke up, but the man began stalking Plummer.

“He came to my house, and basically he punched me in the face and split my lips, so I started to panic and then he pulled a gun on me and held me at gunpoint for five hours,” Plummer said. “I’d never been through anything like that in my life. I come from a place of privilege where that doesn’t usually happen.”

Plummer went to Project DOVE, a nonprofit that provides services for domestic violence survivors, for a restraining order. After he told the advocate he was gay, Plummer said she went to work providing services.

“They made space for me. They bent over backwards for me, and they saved my life,” he said.

A new LGBTQI+ survivors group grew out of Plummer’s experience. He said people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and other non-heterosexual orientations are often afraid to seek help for domestic violence and sexual assault. Plummer worked

with DOVE staff to reach these communities in Ontario, the next closest one he found was in San Diego. He stayed on as a volunteer with DOVE and now serves as Outreach Advocate for the organization.

“As the work happened there, I got more keyed into the community,” he said.

In the two years since the assault, Plummer has become a pillar of his community. He started a monthly LGBTQ brunch to create camaraderie among those who often feel lonely or unseen. He also initiated a fundraising campaign to replace the senior center’s leaky roof. With fellow members of the Coalition for Ontario, he works to expand understanding and involvement in local civics, including volunteer and community improvement projects. Making use of his MFA, Plummer teaches improv classes to kids in the Latinx community. He also helped organize a city-wide Community Serve Day, when church-goers spend a day organizing the food pantry, painting a bridge or working in a garden.

“When I moved back, there were a lot of people who didn’t have hope,” Plummer said. “My friends and I wondered what could we do to give people a little bit of hope. It’s fun to see, little by little, these pieces come together.”

In Chicago, Plummer had worked corporate jobs and participated in large protests, but he said the return to Eastern Oregon reaffirmed his commitment to family and positive action.

“I used to be really critical and negative, and it led me down some pretty dark paths,” he said. “I just got tired of it and decided to focus on solutions.”

The bitterness and anger he felt after attending demonstrations in Chicago didn’t work in his rural town of less than 12,000 people. But his passion for affecting change found its perfect fit.

“There’s a lot of need in Chicago, but it’s hard to affect change you can see directly,” Plummer said. “In Ontario, I can go and stand with seniors and say, ‘You deserve a roof that doesn’t leak in your food,’ then you put the work in and they see the first couple thousand dollars come in. You



The monthly LGBTQ brunch in Ontario, Ore., was started by Chris Plummer, '02, as a way to build community. He also volunteers on a number of other local projects. Photo credit: Sharla Young.



can see that appreciation on their face and how they carry themselves.”

Plummer said his 96-year-old grandma inspired the project. When his many commitments begin to seem like too much, he said living with and caring for her keeps him grounded in routine.

“I promised my grandma when I was 7 years old that she would never go to a nursing home, and I meant it,” he said. “Every Friday we go to seniors’ lunch, we watch movies and eat together, we go on long drives on Sundays and stop for ice cream or coffee. I have to protect that relationship.”

Nonetheless, he said his Saturdays keep filling up with new projects: a mud volleyball fundraiser for the Tri-County Anti-Trafficking Task Force, or giving the local fire hydrants a fresh coat of paint.

“One of the things I learned from EOU, is that you can be in a small town and never, ever be bored,” he said, remembering his years on cam-

pus as a golden era when he came out for the first time and built close friendships. “There are so many opportunities to be part of something and help in Ontario. I came home to do good things in a community that gave me everything.”

Plummer said some of his friends from improv groups in Chicago are on Netflix now, and he’s happy for them, but still feels he made the right choice in coming home to be with his grandma.

“My family is everything to me,” he said. “I found that when I was onstage doing anything in Chicago I kept looking out for my family in the audience and they were never there. It was a hollow feeling, and it made what I was doing kind of ridiculous. I only have my grandmother for a certain amount of time, so I didn’t want to miss out on that.”

Yes, and he found a way to keep making people smile. ♦



Being of service on the air

Local news anchor Mark Hanrahan, '04, finds himself on the frontline of community issues nearly every day.

From behind the evening news desk at KREM in Spokane, he tells viewers the latest happenings at 5, 6, 10 and 11 p.m. each night.

"Journalism offers something new and interesting every day," Hanrahan said. "It's a very important job for society and the communities that we work in."

Recruited to Eastern Oregon University as a quarterback, Hanrahan ended up playing safety during his collegiate career while studying Philosophy, Politics and Economics. But he got his first taste of journalism during an internship in Costa Rica, where he translated Central American news bulletins into English.

After that, he went from KPTV in Portland, to KRTV in Great Falls, Montana, to KOAA in Colorado Springs, then back to Portland for KPTV and KGW. In between, he married fellow Mountaineer Maribell (Vargas) Hanrahan, '04.

Since Hanrahan joined the station as an anchor in 2015, the couple and their two children have made Spokane their home.

"It's a very demanding job, so you figure out quickly whether it's for you or not," Hanrahan said. "I worked weekends and all the holidays far from home for many years."

Holidays also mark annual community involvement for Hanrahan and his colleagues,

who coordinate Tom's Turkey Drive each November to provide hundreds of thousands of meals. He said the station also does a Diaper Drive and connects veterans with pets that need a new home.

Although each day brings new stories to report, Hanrahan said his routine has remained steady since his early days as an intern and beat reporter. He'd pitch stories from the "crime and courts" beat he covered to the producers and news directors at a daily editorial meeting. Then all of the reporters got their assignments and spent the day pursuing their stories, conducting interviews and editing together a segment for the evening news.

"Everybody has this idea of what a journalist or reporter does, but the majority aren't covering [Washington,] D.C. every day. They're covering school board or city council decisions that affect the community."

- Mark Hanrahan, '04

"It's a weird thing, because your whole day is working to create about 90 seconds in the newscast," Hanrahan said. "And if breaking news happens, everything gets tossed out the window."

As an anchor, Hanrahan said his workdays start at 2:30 p.m. He writes and records teasers for the day's lead stories and edits scripts for the nightly news. Nowadays he does

fewer stories, but Hanrahan said reporting on Gonzaga University basketball, wildfire season in 2018 and more difficult stories like school shootings keep him involved in the process.

"I've covered a lot of tragedy over the years, and that never gets easy," he said. "First and foremost, you're a human being and then a journalist."

KREM has been recognized by the city of Spokane for the station's community outreach. Hanrahan credits his upbringing in Newport with instilling a commitment to give back generously and stay involved in his own neighborhood.

"Everybody has this idea of what a journalist or reporter does, but the majority aren't covering [Washington,] D.C. every day. They're covering school board or city council decisions that affect the community," Hanrahan said.

When he was searching for a career path, internships gave Hanrahan direction, and today he's grateful to be in a field that brings new surprises and challenges with every day. He said he and his wife are grateful for their time at EOU and fulfilling life that their education equipped them to build.

"It's gratifying when you're able to give an answer when somebody reaches out to you," Hanrahan said. "When you hold people in power accountable or you're able to get resolution for [an individual] or community as a whole." ♦

Mark Hanrahan, '04, prepares to anchor the nightly newscast on KREM 2 in Spokane.

MOUNTAINEER TRACKS

Weddings

Michael Goings, '12, and Lindsey Bohard were married on Sept. 7, 2019 in Cle Elum, Washington.

Births

Carolyn, '19, and Tim Olmstead welcomed Olivia Olmsted on Dec. 19, 2018 in Tacoma, Washington.

Accomplishments

Robert M. Vancil, '61, published "April and My Classmates: Growing up in small towns in Northeast Oregon" in 2019.

Dori Kite, '80, joined Red Chair Gallery in downtown Bend as a member artist. Her sculpture work developed through studying art at EOU.

Sammy Fudge, '83, was named principal of Hidden Valley Middle School in Roanoke, Virginia. He brings almost 20 years of experience to the position.

Amy Lay's, '94, watercolor artwork was exhibited in August at Mountain Trails in Jackson Hole, Wyoming.

Allen Morris, '02, exhibited a collection of photographs at the Lee Dam Center for Fine Arts in Marysville, Kansas in August. Now an instructor at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Morris took his first photography class at EOU and grew up in rural Eastern Oregon.

Michelle Jensen, '06, has begun her first year as principal of Boones Ferry Primary School in Wilsonville.

Deputy Chief **Kevin Olson, '13**, retired from Valley Regional Fire Authority in Auburn, Washington after 28 years of service.

Maloree Moss, '15, started her first season as head girls' basketball coach at Hermiston High School.

Issac Updike, '15, placed 8th in men's steeplechase at the U.S. Track and Field Championships. Now a sponsored athlete based in Alaska, Updike was the NAIA steeplechase champion his senior year and placed 12th at the Olympic Trials in 2016.

Tyler Zyph, '15, was hired to coach boys' basketball at Pilot Rock High School.

Obituaries

Faculty & Friends

Teddy D. Atkinson, '70
Joy Jones
Joseph W. Larson

Alumni

1940s

Denver C. Ginsey, '47
Emily L. Theodosiou, '43

1950s

Jim A. Bier, '57
Donald L. Grieger, '57
Georgia E. Lind, '53

1960s

Eleanor G. Brownnton, '67
Patty L. Grimes, '69
Douglas Romaine, '63
Randy L. Simmons, '69
Elton Sorensen, '62
Barbara Unck, '64
Faith J. Westenskow, '60
Craig A. Woodward, '69

1970s

Bruce D. Craig, '77
Doris E. Derrick, '70
Gail L. Horning, '72
Kathryn A. Merrick, '73

1980s

Miriam K. Aschim, '80
Ronald E. Prindle, '86
Virginia A. Salter, '89
Gary D. Searles, '83

1990s

Ronald S. Blincoe, '91
Julie R. Gregory, '92
Kenneth D. Kennedy, '97
Judy Perkins, '92
Catherine J. Sass, '92

2000s

Elizabeth H. Tucker, '06
Richard F. Zita, '06

2010s

Michael J. Berryman, '11
Lorili L. Mack, '17

In memoriam



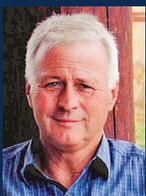
Teddy "Ted" Atkinson, '70

Teddy "Ted" Atkinson, '70, passed away at age 71 on May 1 at his home in La Grande. He was born in Baker City, and later moved to La Grande.

He transferred to EOU in 1967 to play football, and stayed on to complete his master's degree. Atkinson worked for Boise Cascade before turning his career toward education. He earned his doctorate and became a Professor Emeritus in business.

He was active in the National Wildland Firefighters Association and was a proud member of the Northern Cherokee Nation and a descendent of the Osage Nation. Atkinson enjoyed hunting, fishing, huckleberry picking, coin collecting, improving his timber property and following his grandson's baseball games.

In memoriam



Craig Woodward, '69

Craig Woodward, '69, passed away on April 24, 2019 in Prineville. His longtime friend, author Rick Steber, wrote the following in his memory:

"He cut a wide swath through a colorful life that extended from winning a National Championship as a wrestler, to becoming a timber baron and cattleman who controlled thousands of acres

from the Ochoco Mountains to Central and South America. He was honest, hard working and innovative in his thinking. He never backed down from a bully... He was a devoted husband and family man. On his last day, he drove to Lakeview to watch one of his grandsons play baseball. It is hard to lose a friend like Craig; it is harder yet to go on living without him."



James Gorham, '95, (second from right) recently visited the Health and Human Performance lab on campus with exercise science students and professor Kyle Pfaffenbach.

DONOR SPOTLIGHT

Part of something bigger

A new business in his old hometown inspired James Gorham, '95, to get involved in the EOU Foundation. Now, more than 10 years later, the business is thriving and Gorham is a member of the EOU Foundation Board of Directors.

After graduation, he earned his master's in physical therapy and opened his own clinic in Sherwood, Oregon. When he moved back to La Grande in 2007 to be near family, Gorham quickly got involved in the community that raised him.

"I felt like I needed to give back to the place that had made me who I am," he said. "It was a difficult time at the university and I wanted to be a part of helping turn things around."

As one of the owners of Mountain Valley Therapy, Gorham has played a role in strengthening the relationship between local businesses and EOU. He volunteers on the EOU Foundation Scholarship Review Committee, reading hundreds of essays and applications each February. Gorham said he received a Foundation scholarship as a student, when he said tuition cost about \$300 a term. Now that his son is an EOU student, that number is closer to \$2,500.

"The need for scholarships has risen dramatically," Gorham said. "There's a direct correlation between scholarships available and the number of students who can attend college."

Gorham and his wife Tracey support the Health and Human Performance program, since he studied exercise science and works in the industry. Regardless of their major, though, Gorham said he's eager to show every student how they can be successful at EOU. They give to the Building Champions campaign, in addition to scholarships.

"For me, it's about giving back and knowing that what you're giving goes directly to students who may not otherwise be able to go to college," Gorham said. "Life gets busy and we don't stop to think about it, but if it hadn't been for Eastern I wouldn't have what I do today."

Gorham said his family has lived in the Grande Ronde Valley since the 1870s, and those deep roots keep him committed to improving access and opportunity for students in the region. Alongside his fellow Foundation Trustees, Gorham said he's inspired by the sense of working toward a common goal.

"I really enjoy the teamwork and bringing people together from so many different walks of life for the goal of making EOU better," he said. "Giving of time, giving of ideas — that's altruism, being part of something bigger to make something better." ♦

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