

C H A U T A U Q U A  
**PILLARS**

SPRING 2015

CHAUTAUQUA, NY

**S**teve Percy will finish up his final year as chairman of the Chautauqua Foundation Board of Directors in August of 2015. In anticipation of the transition, the Foundation Board confirmed Cathy Bonner of Austin, Texas, in February, as its chair-elect. She will be the first woman to serve in this capacity in the history of the Foundation.

Bonner, who has been coming to Chautauqua for 20 years, has deep experience across business, government, and philanthropy. As the *Austin Business Journal* once exclaimed, "It's not hard to find Cathy Bonner's mark all over Texas."

In the 1980s, Bonner founded the marketing, communications

## CATHY BONNER NAMED CHAIR-ELECT OF THE CHAUTAUQUA FOUNDATION BOARD

and public relations firm Bonner, Inc. Her business acumen got the attention of Texas governor Ann Richards, who tapped Bonner to head the Texas Department of Commerce from 1991 to 1994. Over four consecutive years Bonner helped Texas create more jobs than any other state in the nation. She also managed the Texas Tourism advertising program, four foreign

trade offices and a \$500 million biennial budget.

Following her stint in state government, Bonner conceived the idea of the nation's first comprehensive Women's History Museum and raised \$32 million to build the museum in a renovated historic building in 1996. She has also served as president of the



Submitted Photo

see **BONNER** on page 2

## SUSAN AND JACK TURBEN ESTABLISH DIRECTORSHIP OF THE VACI GALLERIES

**L**ike their good friends and Chautauqua neighbors Char and Chuck Fowler, Susan and Jack Turben are avid participants in the Visual Arts at Chautauqua Institution (VACI). Jack and Chuck have been business associates in Cleveland since the mid-1990s, while Susie and Char share a passion for the arts. A few years back, the Turbens were especially taken with the Fowlers' extraordinary investment in the renovation of Fowler-Kellogg Art Center, which, along with Strohl Art Center and the Melvin Johnson Sculpture Garden, now comprise the Institution's dynamic visual arts complex at the intersection of Ramble and Pratt. The Turbens asked how they could contribute.

With the Fowlers' encouragement, the couple has recently set up a combination endowment and bequest intention to create the Susan and Jack Turben Directorship of the VACI Galleries, a position currently held by Judy Barie. It's the second leadership gift for a senior staff position to come through the Promise Campaign. The first was the Emily and Richard Smucker Chair for Education, currently held by Vice President Sherra Babcock.



Submitted Photo

**Jack and Susan Turben**

"This is a critical step toward endowing all of our leadership positions in the arts at Chautauqua," says VACI Artistic Director Don Kimes, "and we are so grateful to the Turbens. The Fowlers and the Strohls profoundly changed the game for the

visual arts at Chautauqua by creating gallery spaces that are competitive with the best in the country. Now that we are beginning to have our leadership positions endowed, we can maintain the level of quality and visibility we've achieved since merging the galleries and the School of Art back in 2007."

Early in his career as a teacher and practicing artist, Kimes joined Chautauqua as VACI artistic director in 1986. Managing director Lois Jubeck followed him in 1989. Barie first came on board as a "gallery sitter" in 2005, and immediately established a strong reputation for selling works and building good relationships with Chautauqua collectors. She assumed the directorship of the galleries when Strohl first opened in 2007.

"Now that we've become a nationally recognized program with top facilities, the Turbens' gift is so critical. There is no way any of us on the current staff can be replaced for the salaries we started with as young professionals. When I step out of the picture, I believe Chautauqua will have to hire full-time leadership with significant experience," Kimes says. (As a measure of his own career trajectory, Kimes — who is also director of studio art at American

University — recently mounted his 10th solo show in New York City, this one at Denise Bibro Fine Art in Manhattan, one of his many exhibitions in recent years in the U.S. and across Europe.)

Galleries director Judy Barie is well known on the grounds for her friendliness, accessibility, and her interest in emerging talent around the country. Sales in the Chautauqua galleries on her watch have increased by a factor of eight, says Kimes. "Judy is always promoting the artists past and present who have shown their work at Chautauqua. Through our contacts around the country, she has brought in a lot of artists you really wouldn't know about," he explains. He and Barie each curate several shows every season, bringing in work by nationally recognized and emerging artists, while keeping a balance between two- and three-dimensional works in a variety of media. All the shows are specifically developed with Chautauqua's distinctive gallery spaces in mind.

As a testament to the growing distinction of VACI exhibitions, the 2015 season will include works by such historically renowned artists as Francisco Goya, Robert

see **TURBEN** on page 4

**“The people who have given gifts through the Promise Campaign are looking toward the future, and they trust this administration to deliver. The more we grow the Chautauqua Fund, the more we can grow the Institution and preserve what we consider sacred.”**

—Cathy Bonner

**BONNER** from page 1

National Foundation for Women’s Resources; founder of Leadership Texas, Leadership America and Power Pipeline; founding chair of the first Austin Commission on the Status of Women; and member of the ClubCorp National Women’s advisory board. *Fortune* magazine named her one of the most influential women entrepreneurs in the country, declaring her “smart, gutsy and innovative.”

Over the decade ending in 2006, Bonner’s company also launched and promoted 14 state-supported college savings programs, creating more than \$30 billion in financial assets via the popular 529 college savings plans. In 2007, after her friend Ann Richards died of cancer, Bonner formed a coalition and passed a \$3 billion bond election establishing the Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas to find cures for cancer in the next decade.

In the last several years before her recent retirement, Bonner was CEO and Chair of the Board of Directors of Service King Collision Repair Centers — a national chain operating in 30 states with 225 collision repair centers across the country.

*PILLARS* talked to Bonner about the work ahead and her vision for the Chautauqua Foundation.

***PILLARS:* What drew you to Chautauqua in the first place?**

I came with a group to celebrate a friend’s 50th birthday. We rented a house for a week and I haven’t missed a summer [since then]. One year, I stayed for seven weeks at the Women’s Club. I became a property owner on Bestor Plaza nine years ago. After retirement, I solidified my commitment and total immersion by joining the Chautauqua Foundation Board of Directors.

***PILLARS:* What led you to get involved in the governance of the Foundation?**

I didn’t expect to take on a major role. I think I was recruited because of my business background and my experience in building endowments and in historic renovation projects like the Women’s History Museum in Dallas. I am a big fan of Robert Greenleaf’s concept of servant leadership. He says a leader is someone who is always searching and listening, and hoping that a better wheel is in the making.

***PILLARS:* Where do you think Chautauqua is headed as a center for national discourse?**

There is something happening at Chautauqua right now. It is becoming a place where new art is made. We know the most important thing going on here is intellectual stimulation, conversations around issues, and lifelong learning, but the other thing is the arts, which have always been a part of the mix. The possibilities I saw in *The Romeo & Juliet Project* (which I was pleased to help sponsor) were breathtaking. How fabulous it will be for Chautauqua to be a place where new art is regularly made. Where else in the U.S. do you have ballet, symphony, opera, theater, music and the literary and visual arts? It is such an incredible convergence of opportunity and creative spirit.

We get to swim in this rich artistic soup. If I have any vision at all, it is for Chautauqua to be known as a place where art is made in a nurturing and progressive community.

***PILLARS:* And, of course, the Amp is central to such a vision. Do you want to comment on the goal of having an Amp that will last for another 100 years?**

Part of our fiduciary responsibility is to rehabilitate, restore and rebuild those facilities that are aging and deteriorating. We cannot postpone this work. Let’s face it, the Amp is basically a roof over a sacred space — the only section of it that is actually a building is the part around the Massey Organ, which is being protected in the proposed plan, just as it has been at regular intervals in the life of this Institution. The task is to preserve and protect what we can and rebuild what we can’t.

We need to honor the artists who perform in this space by providing them safety. We have areas in the current configuration of the Amp that are not good for the disabled. The roof situation — if you’ve been up in the attic space above the ceiling — is troubling. I hope people go up and have a look at that area this summer.

We can’t bury our heads in the sand. We must be about preserving our sacred spaces. Our objective is to add to and make it stronger, just as Chautauqua has done time and again in this space over the last 100 years.



Don’t get me wrong; I am glad we are having the conversation about this project in the coming season. We need to build community around the Amp. It is an opportunity to get people more engaged in building and protecting our assets. Frankly, there are lots of buildings that need our investment in maintenance and protection. I am delighted that people have come forward and care enough to say, “I want to have a voice in this project.”

***PILLARS:* What can you say about the relative health of the Foundation and where you’d like to see it go during your tenure?**

Chautauqua has a very healthy Foundation. It took a hit in 2008 and roared back to recover and more than double in value. We have to give credit to Steve Percy and the Foundation Board for their choices that have enabled a slow, steady climb to get back to a place that’s better than where we were before the bottom dropped out. There isn’t any nonprofit or educational institution that didn’t take a hit in that time. That we are back and better is evidence of a very prudent and disciplined approach to our investments.

We have fabulous development staff who have also added capital all along. We are at a really great point right now, not far from \$100 million [in total net assets]. When I begin as chair in 2015, I want us to develop a strategic plan for the Foundation that is in sync with the Institution’s Board of Trustees’ strategy. The Foundation, after all, is charged with caring for the investments that people have made for the betterment of Chautauqua Institution, which is the trustees’ first concern.

I have to admit that “go big or go home” is the way I work. I will

be pushing for rapid growth in the Chautauqua Fund, which allows the Institution to have more resources for annual operations and programs, and to hold the line on gate ticket prices. The people who have given gifts through the Promise Campaign are looking toward the future, and they trust this administration to deliver. The more we grow the Chautauqua Fund, the more we can grow the Institution and preserve what we consider sacred.

***PILLARS:* What does it mean to be the first woman to chair the board of the Chautauqua Foundation?**

That historic moment is not lost on me. I didn’t know that fact until several board members told me. I know we have a real commitment to diversity and inclusion at Chautauqua. I want to do the best job I can and make way for more women and minority leaders to get involved.

Because I have a marketing background, I approach this work believing that our greatest opportunity and challenge is to understand who our donors are and how they give. We have many different segments to reach with a message about the need for philanthropy — return visitors, first-time visitors, season ticket holders, major donors, property owners, donors who rent, arts patrons, visitors drawn to particular themes, corporate sponsors and more. We have to learn about their giving experience. For example, I didn’t personally give Chautauqua any money other than the annual Chautauqua Fund until my 10th year of coming here, so it takes time to learn what matters. We still have a lot to learn about all the parts of our community.



## FROM THE CEO GEOF FOLLANSBEE

# Promise Update: Going Far Beyond

Someone recently asked me how I'm feeling about the Promise Campaign. The short answer is very good. In fact, I'd say that all the signs are promising, indeed. What we've witnessed so far in this campaign are many, many individuals and families who have made Chautauqua their greatest philanthropic priority. A significant number have made the largest gift to Chautauqua in this campaign that they've ever made to any organization. These generous people have thus affirmed that Chautauqua can, and should, be a place for transformational philanthropy.

Some facts: we have received the largest gift in the history of the Institution, a gift that is three-and-a-half times larger than any outright gift Chautauqua has ever received, and twice the size of our largest bequest. Particularly in response to the Amphitheater project (see page 4), most donor families perceive their gift to be something that will have an impact long beyond their lifetimes. They are saying, in effect, that Chautauqua is not just a summer place that creates programming for nine weeks, but rather a national institution with year-round goals and projects worthy of a transformational investment.

It is also wonderfully positive and energizing to find that a number of new Chautauquans — people who have only recently entered into the community — have been eager to contribute to the Promise Campaign. They prove that a Chautauquan need not be a many-year, or multi-generational, participant to embrace what this community is about.

As this issue of *PILLARS* attests, there are people who have made Chautauqua their highest priority with gifts of many sizes — by establishing a scholarship fund, a lecture endowment, underwriting a leadership position or significantly raising the level of their annual giving.

Take Barb Mackey and her early gift of \$1 million to establish the Joan Brown Campbell Fund in the Department of Religion. Barb took great care to plan and structure a gift that would honor her beloved parents while also making a long-term impact on the Department of Religion, securing the special legacy of Joan's service to Chautauqua.

Similarly, the Clergy Leadership Program — just launched this year — is propelled by a \$500,000 gift from the Lilly Endowment, immediately establishing Chautauqua as one of the pre-eminent institutions in the country working on pastoral leadership in the public square. The program will provide an intensive professional development experience for early-career pastors. (See the story on page 8.)

We have also recently received a \$200,000 anonymous gift in support of Chautauqua's interfaith New Clergy Program after operating this project for 15 years on a very modest annual budget. Another vote of confidence in the Promise.

On page 10 you can read the story of two sisters — Pam Hemminger and Lisa Jackson — who discovered, by chance, that their grandparents had established a lecture

**No single item in the Promise Campaign is more significant, however, than the Amphitheater, the stage where the broadest possible blossoming of talent takes place before our eyes every day of every season.**

endowment at Chautauqua. After their own experiences with the 2 p.m. lectures, they have now made a commitment to enlarge the family endowment to support an entire week of interfaith lectures.

The recent announcement of the Susan and Jack Turben Directorship of the VACI galleries establishes the second major leadership endowment following the creation of the Emily and Richard Smucker Chair in the Department of Education. The Turbens' gift is transformational in that it secures the work of Chautauqua's galleries director and our ability to retain and attract leadership for this position in the years ahead. (See page 1.)

An individual, longtime donor — Georgia Court of Sarasota, Florida — has just this year set in motion a remarkable collaboration between the Chautauqua Theater Company, the Florida Studio Theatre, and two local school districts in the Chautauqua region. The Young Playwrights Project (pages 6 and 7) is off to a roaring start and has brought 160 third graders to the

grounds to showcase their creativity and expand their understanding of theater as literature.

Two young Chautauqua couples — Jeff and Suzanne Watters, and Michael and Elysha O'Brien — have made stretch gifts to the Chautauqua Fund this year, while also being a part of the human capital that is essential to our community's vitality. (See their stories on pages 9 and 11.)

I am deeply grateful to witness such generous investments and others about which you will learn more in the following pages. Inside the Promise, there are many giving opportunities of all sizes yet to be realized — whether it is supporting counselors at Boys' and Girls' Club, endowing the music director position for the Chautauqua Symphony Orchestra, securing endowment to maintain and care for the Amphitheater, or renovating Bellinger Hall to improve the accommodations offered to the talented students attending our Schools of Fine & Performing Arts.

Unlike Las Vegas, which promotes itself with the slogan "What Happens Here, Stays Here," I think we must say of Chautauqua that through philanthropy, through the training of young artists, through the intelligence shared by our brilliant speakers and preachers, and through the vigor and values that Chautauquans bring to the grounds and carry back home, our slogan might well be "What Happens Here, Goes Far Beyond Here."

That is exactly what we mean by the Promise.

## NEW DIRECTOR OF GIFT PLANNING, DUSTY NELSON

Dustin "Dusty" Nelson is the new Director of Gift Planning for the Chautauqua Foundation. He fills the position that opened when Karen Blozie assumed the role of Senior Major Gifts Officer, replacing Linda Steckley upon her retirement in March. "We are grateful to Linda for her extraordinary work and are pleased that she and her husband, Pete Weitzel, will continue to reside here as loyal Chautauquans," says Foundation CEO Geof Follansbee. "We are also pleased with Karen's move and thrilled that Dusty Nelson has come on board. Dusty will



Submitted Photo  
**Nelson**

bring to this position a vital knowledge of estate planning and tax law, the confidence of the clients he has represented in the region for more than 30 years, an entrepreneurial instinct that has allowed him to sustain and manage a small law firm, and a deep affection for and knowledge of the Institution."

Nelson is the son-in-law of former Foundation director Sam Price and grew up spending summers here.

"Chautauqua is central to everything I've done in my life," Nelson says.

An involvement in the arts runs deep in his family. His grandmother — whose parents first bought a house at 35 Foster — studied violin at Juilliard. His parents, Herbert and Joan DeWeese Nelson, were actors who regularly took the stage in New York City as members of Joseph Papp's Shakespeare in the Park troupe. One of his sisters is a graduate of the New England Conservatory of Music. Though Nelson characterizes himself as more of an athletic type, he also plays guitar. His daughter, Sophie, is a writer. His son Dusty Jr. is a

club tennis professional. Son Willy is a senior studying geology at the College of Wooster.

Nelson met his wife Theo at the Institution and was the tennis pro on the grounds before heading to law school. When the time came to settle down, Chautauqua County seemed the perfect place to set up his practice, and he has represented many Chautauquans in their purchase of property and other legal matters over the years. "I am looking forward to helping people at Chautauqua find creative ways to save money while meeting their charitable desires," he says.



**TURBEN** from page 1

Rauschenberg, and Fernando Botero in an exhibition created in cooperation with the American University Museum at the Katzen Arts Center in Washington, D.C. Many other partnerships with distinguished galleries have been a part of recent visual arts programming at Chautauqua.

Ironically, the Turbens had never met Judy Barie when they made an initial gift to VACI. They soon became acquainted and purchased art from the galleries. “We were very impressed with Judy and with the whole leadership team’s work to program the facility,” says Jack. “Susie particularly likes the architecture of the VACI complex.”

The Turbens share a passion for art and architecture. A number of years ago, thumbing through a magazine while flying back to Cleveland from Colorado, they discovered a Frank Lloyd Wright house that was available on Lake Erie. They ended up buying the property, which Jack

happily notes is 25 minutes closer to Chautauqua than their home in Cleveland. The Turbens have worked hard to restore the house and to have it declared a national historical site with preservation easements.

Jack, a lifelong Clevelander and private equity and business investment specialist, has a fascination with Wright that dates back to the course he took at Yale with art and architectural historian Vincent Scully. Susan, who is an early-childhood development specialist and a former board member for National Public Radio, grew up in Buffalo with a native interest in Frank Lloyd Wright’s work.

Susan also knew of Chautauqua from childhood stints as a camper on Chautauqua Lake. Her grandmother was a musician who played in the Athenaeum some 60 years ago, but it wasn’t until friends invited them to the grounds that they realized what they were missing. “I had heard of this place,” says Jack, “but I lived 55 years of my life

**“This gift will make a tremendous impact on the future growth of the galleries.”**

—Judy Barie

without having any idea what people were talking about.” He chuckles.

Right away they “got hooked,” as they put it. They found the lectures, the arts and the lake itself quite compelling. They keep a 19-foot Boston Whaler docked in front of their rental house next door to the Fowlers. “We’re all in,” says Jack, “we do the full complement, including golf and tennis.” Their enduring friendship with the Fowlers is icing on the cake.

For her part, Judy Barie says, “It hasn’t even hit us yet how important the Turbens’ gift is going to be to VACI. These resources will help free up other funds, which might go toward publicity for shows or our shipping budget, which is critical to the more eclectic exhibitions we

aspire to bring. And from there, as we sell more art, we can also fund more scholarships for visual arts students. This gift will make a tremendous impact on the future growth of the galleries. It’s a personal compliment to me that the Fowlers and Turbens always bring in their friends to the galleries to view the exhibitions. VACI has so much more visibility now, and it’s all about strolling — through Fowler-Kellogg, then across the brick walk to Strohl, upstairs and down, and then into the Melvin Johnson Sculpture Garden out back.”

For Char Fowler the Turben gift also speaks to friendship, now put to work in service to Chautauqua. “Chuck and I have valued our friendship with Jack and Susie through the years,” she says. “We admire their zest for life, their intelligent conversations, and their generosity here at Chautauqua and at home in the Cleveland area. We are most grateful for their latest gift for the directorship at the VACI galleries, insuring quality ‘arts experiences’ for many in years to come!”

## The Amp:

### NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

In January 2015, Chautauqua Institution President Tom Becker recommended a deferral of any decisions regarding the Amphitheater renewal project until the August meeting of the Institution’s Board of Trustees. The delay provides the opportunity for further discussions in the community through a formal process of inquiry, conversation and reflection. Becker has indicated Chautauqua’s leadership is committed to engaging in “authentic, fact-based exchanges with all community members who are sincerely interested in the development of an Amphitheater to serve Chautauqua’s programming needs for this century and beyond.”

The Ricochet Group, a consulting firm based in New York City, is in the midst of designing a

community engagement process that will help the Institution’s board and staff make the best possible decisions regarding the Amp’s future. The firm will conduct weekly dialogue sessions on the grounds during the first six weeks of the 2015 season.

How will this process differ from the public information sessions about the project that were held during past seasons? The key difference, according to Ricochet President Ric Wanetik, will be the use of facilitated dialogue. “We want to be certain,” says Wanetik, “that by the time the board meets in August, all Chautauquans have had the opportunity to be heard and understood.”

Elliot Fishman, Ricochet’s vice president, explains: “We envision

a formal dialogue that will use the skills of a facilitator to help participants share information and ideas on an equal footing. This is different from a traditional presentation where there is a provider of information and an audience. Both are valid forms of exchange, but the traditional format has an inherent power differential that sometimes inhibits the free flow of facts and ideas.”

The dates, times, location and format of these sessions will be announced in the *Daily* and on [ciweb.org/amp-project](http://ciweb.org/amp-project), so the community will know how the sessions will be conducted and what will be done with the information and ideas that will be documented for the full board’s consideration.

Prior to the summer season, Ricochet staff are working with a small but diverse group of Chautauquans who have expressed a variety of viewpoints and concerns about the project to help create the most constructive design for the dialogue. “We want to make sure the meetings on the grounds produce authentic discourse, and we want to make sure going into these sessions that we understand the universe of beliefs and opinions about the Amp and the current Amp plans,” Wanetik says. “This understanding will help ensure Chautauqua’s leadership has the benefit of a wide array of opinions and ideas going forward, and the community will have played a vital role in informing an ultimate decision.”

# Finding Home: Nowosielski and Lutz Take On Chautauqua Fund Leadership

Several seasons back, Cathy Nowosielski and her husband, Jeff Lutz, got the notion to host a Thanksgiving dinner in the summer at Chautauqua, just before Old First Night. “I love event planning,” Cathy explains, “and in my family growing up, my mother cooked a traditional Thanksgiving meal far more often than just once a year.”

Nowosielski is a physician-turned-hospital-chaplain and a first-generation Chautauquan. Lutz, her husband of 34 years, is a partner in the health care practice of Deloitte Consulting in Detroit.

“When we sat down to the meal with the priests in residence at the Catholic House and a small group of guests to say the blessing, I suddenly knew that this was going to be my Chautauqua tradition, my Thanksgiving for Chautauqua,” Cathy says, choking up a little. “It’s our way of touching a few people at a time.”

Jeff interrupts, smiling. “Not really a few people. We had way more than 60 people this past season,” he says.

As the event grew, Cathy began ordering turkeys freshly cooked from the Lighthouse Grocery, because she can’t possibly prepare them all. She still manages to cook the prime rib, however, and has been known to encourage guests to bring cranberry relish or other sides to the round out the feast. The dinner party usually spills into the yard of the house across from McKnight Hall, where the couple has rented accommodations for several years.



Submitted Photo  
Cathy and Jeff with their son, Ryan

## Lives of Service

This is how the Nowosielski-Lutz household tends to roll. They are doers. “I have never really not volunteered to work in cultural and educational institutions,” Cathy admits. She has been active in Chautauqua’s Catholic community from day one and is currently serving on its board of trustees. Back home, she serves the University of Michigan on the honors alumni board and on the admissions committee for the medical school. Jeff, a Harvard MBA, has been a regent with Orchard Lake St. Mary’s Schools (the only Polish seminary in the U.S.) and is currently involved with the capital campaign at the University of Michigan, where he and Cathy met as undergraduates at a fraternity/sorority mixer.

With two grown sons — Andrew, 30, who works in golf course management in Atlanta, and Ryan, 27, an auditor for Deloitte in Detroit — the couple is now looking toward retirement, when they will spend summers at Chautauqua and winters in Marco Island, Fla. With this goal in mind, the pair finally found a house on the grounds, purchased in the same month that they agreed to chair the annual Chautauqua Fund, taking the reins from Jack and Yvonne McCredie, who have served with gusto in that capacity for the last three years.

Chautauqua Fund director Tina Downey notes that the McCredies have agreed to continue as honorary co-chairs in the upcoming year to assist with the transition to new leadership. “I am so pleased that Cathy and Jeff have agreed to serve Chautauqua in this capacity,” Downey says. “Their clear passion for this place and its ideals — coupled with their strength of commitment and leadership — will be of great benefit to this community and will serve to strengthen the annual delivery of programs.”

Jeff was pleased with the invitation to serve. “The McCredies told us they were looking for new blood, and that is unusual for us to hear, since we are usually the old-timers when it comes to fundraising.” He laughs.

“For me,” says Cathy, “I do have some background in chairing a few annual fund campaigns, and I’m excited to be working with the Foundation’s enthusiastic staff, whom I got to know last summer when we volunteered. The McCredies became friends quickly, too. I thought they were clear and succinct in their message about the importance of the Chautauqua Fund. So one thing led to another, and here we are.”

“The first thing I asked for was to study the finances of the Institution,” Jeff adds. “The annual fund really is critical. It is the primary stopgap measure to keep this place going. Every dollar and donation counts. The gate pass couldn’t possibly cover all that you get at Chautauqua.”

**“When we sat down to the meal with the priests in residence at the Catholic House and a small group of guests to say the blessing, I suddenly knew that this was going to be my Chautauqua tradition, my Thanksgiving for Chautauqua. It’s our way of touching a few people at a time.”**

—Cathy Nowosielski

## Establishing Roots

Jeff and Cathy have jumped in the deep end with delight. Their introduction to the place, fewer than 20 years ago, came from Chautauquan Mary Stroh Henderson, a friend of Cathy.

In 1997, Cathy decided to take a road trip to Cape Cod. Her friend Mary had always told her that if she were coming through western New York in the summer, she should stop at Chautauqua for a visit. “Mary always said that no matter where she and her husband lived around the country, she considered Chautauqua home, so I was curious.” After she arrived at the gates at nine o’clock in the evening, weary from a long day of driving, Cathy says, “Mary dragged me down the brick walk and straight into the Amp. I have been at Chautauqua every summer since.”

Cathy relishes the interfaith aspect of the 2 p.m. lectures, and both she and Jeff enjoy the 10:45 a.m. lectures. While Cathy may try to work in a bridge game at the Women’s Club once in a while, Jeff is a faithful pilgrim, standing outside Turner Community Center at 7 a.m. every morning, waiting for the doors to open for his workout.

“I have some new ideas to offer,” Cathy concludes, of the new commitment to the Chautauqua Fund that she and Jeff share, “but I don’t have much of an agenda here, other than that I hope my children and grandchildren will see Chautauqua as their home one day, just as Mary explained it to me.”

# Third-Grade Playwrights Create Magic at Chautauqua



Fletcher Elementary School students arrive at Bellinger Hall

In one play, titled *Attack of the Leftovers*, a gang of foods stowed away in the refrigerator conspires to eat a little boy who did not clean his plate at dinner.

In another play, a girl goes with her mother to the polls. She asks to use the restroom while her mother votes. When the child comes back, she is terrified because all of the adult legs showing beneath the curtains in the voting booths look the same. Where is her mother?

In a third play, reminiscent of *Waiting for Godot*, two rain puddles launch into a dialogue. It turns out they are in a panic because the sun has suddenly come out and is drinking them. They fear total evaporation.

These imaginative storylines are the product of third graders from Chautauqua Lake Elementary and Jamestown's Fletcher Elementary. Through a collaboration with Chautauqua Institution and Florida Studio Theatre, 160 students from these two schools have been honing their creative skills, thanks to a gift from longtime Chautauquan Georgia Court.

## Arts Integration

Deborah Sunya Moore, Chautauqua's associate director of programming, explains: "The Young Playwrights Project comes directly out of the Institution's most recent strategic plan, which calls for a deeper, year-round engagement with the communities around us." In addition to her duties at the Institution, Moore has already been working with teachers and pre-K students on enhancing reading comprehension through the use of music. "But there is only so much I can do as one person," Moore says, "so I met with our artistic directors to figure out how we could bring more of our capacity in the performing and visual arts to bear on local schools in the region."

**"The idea of inviting a younger generation from our local communities to come to the grounds is so important, so that these students can see Chautauqua as part of their cultural heritage. We want these children and their parents to keep coming back."**

—Vivienne Benesch

Last year, and again this year, local students have made field trips to the VACI galleries on the grounds. Elementary students also came to Bratton last year to play theater games, meet Chautauqua Theater Company (CTC) conservatory actors, and tour the facilities. The Young Playwrights Project evolved out of this collaboration between Moore and CTC Artistic Director Vivienne Benesch, who has had a keen interest in getting more deeply involved with youth in the area. "I had no idea what a great educational partner we would have in Deborah," Benesch says. "Her expertise in arts education is a huge asset."

Benesch and Moore drafted a proposal to conduct playwriting workshops in the schools this year, with the hope that the material generated would end up in performances on the grounds by CTC actors with local students in the audience.

Enter Georgia Court, a devoted philanthropist and supporter of literary and theater programming at Chautauqua. When she heard the initial idea, Court, who lives in Sarasota during the winter, suggested Florida Studio Theatre (FST) as a perfect model for Chautauqua to consider.

"FST is the premier theater in Sarasota with five equity stages that operate year-round," Court says. "Their Write-A-Play Program started over 20 years ago and takes actors into K-12 schools across the U.S., Scotland, Israel, Russia and, more recently, to U.S. military bases."

FST's education program serves some 50,000 students per year and culminates in an annual, juried playwriting contest for young authors. Approximately 3,000 entries from student playwrights around the world come into FST for judging. The top plays for each grade level are produced in Sarasota and performed by FST actors during

its playwriting festival. The winning playwrights travel to Florida, often with a teacher and with financial support from several sources, to witness their work premiered on stage. It's a heady experience.

Actor and director Kate Alexander is associate director of FST and co-developed the Write-A-Play Program with artistic director Richard Hopkins. She is the founder of the FST Theatre School, inaugurating programs around the world. She has learned through years of observation and teaching that "children belong to a world that is deeply new to them, a world that we have forgotten as adults," she says. "They create plays that could not be written by adults." Unleashing students' creativity is simply a matter of validating that world and inviting them to share it on the page.

Moore, Benesch and Court held an initial meeting with Alexander at Chautauqua. "You never know how a collaboration is going to work," Alexander says, "but there was a lot of common ground among us. We all share the same aesthetic." The pilot project was launched last fall with the schools' full endorsement.

As Virginia Woolf once put it, "Writing is an act of imagination that the hand records," and with that concept firmly undergirding their first session with the Chautauqua County third graders, Alexander and two FST-affiliated actors from New York City — Christianne Greiert and Matt Ebling — set about showing the students how their imaginations could take flight without worry for just the right word. Writing thus becomes a form of play instead of a task with many rules to master. In this case, spelling and grammar take a back seat to imagination. "The teachers were incredibly supportive of the work," Moore adds.

The FST actors began by bringing all of the children together and showing two plays written by past child

winners — a comedy and a serious play. Through the contrasting pieces, the children witness the spectrum of imaginative opportunities available to them. The students then begin to write plays through improvisation with the actors who portray the characters suggested by the students, who call out different lines and action, and volunteer to join the scene. Eventually, the actors work one-on-one with the children on their individual pieces. Then the regular classroom teacher takes over, committing to continue until the students are ready to submit their plays in final script form.

"Understand, these are three-page plays," Alexander explains, "and we don't manipulate or coerce the children to write about social ills. We simply encourage them to be as fanciful or as deep as they want, drawing from their own experiences and imaginations."

Alexander reports that one class of students was pointed out as having lower-than-grade-level reading abilities when the team went in, but their performance in the exercises "was simply electric."

She also recalls how one child in a wheelchair was creatively cast by his peers in a play involving a roller coaster. "His job was to ride up front in that roller coaster and shout out the last words of the play. I saw him in the hall later in the day with the script still clutched in his hand — his words, his own lines — and he was still smiling."

## Taking the Stage

On a brisk weekend at the end of this January, the third-grade playwrights and their parents gathered in Bellinger Hall on the grounds to hear a marathon reading of all 160 student creations as presented by Chautauqua's Play Reading Group — a devoted gathering of some 125 year-round residents who regularly read and study plays together during the long winter months. More than 40 members of the group, headed by Chautauquan Bob McClure, came together to read and rehearse the student material in teams before presenting the plays to the students and their families.

"I think everyone in our group was astounded at how different the plays were from each other," McClure



Photos: Chautauqua Institution

### Young playwrights from Chautauqua Lake Elementary School

says. “It was fabulous to reconnect with that 8- or 9-year-old perspective on the world and to look into the students’ faces as we read their work.” McClure is a former teacher and researcher with the National Education Association, who first came to Chautauqua as a platform speaker, got hooked, and then retired on the grounds and assumed the leadership of the Play Reading Group, which had been meeting for many years.

According to Kate Alexander, who has been on site at each stage of the project, “The day of the performance, we knew the parents already had a heads-up that something important was going on. As one parent said to me after the readings: ‘Now I get it. No wonder my son loves language so much. He has been coming home from school all fired up about this.’” Alexander also notes the play

readers’ enthusiasm. “Bringing them in to present the plays was brilliant on Chautauqua’s part because they conveyed their deep respect for literature. They were gleeful in this assignment!”

“Of course, Kate’s approach is just magical,” says Georgia Court, who is already looking to expand the program beyond the third grade and across all the schools in the county. “I want it to be a really big thing for kids to come on the grounds and see their plays produced at Chautauqua.”

“I have never seen our third graders so excited or motivated,” said Fletcher Elementary principal Maria DeJoy in an interview with Jamestown’s *Post-Journal*.

The culmination of the project — the selection of nine student plays for a staging at Chautauqua — is still

ahead in June. Conservatory students from the Chautauqua Theater Company, under the direction of Vivienne Benesch, will perform the short plays during the last week before the regular Chautauqua season begins. Both elementary schools will once more bring their students to the grounds to see the show in Elizabeth S. Lenna Hall or Fletcher Music Hall. Chautauqua will also publish the winning plays online and film the performances.

“The students will get to see their plays fully realized with conviction,” says Benesch. “We will bring in some creative props, the suggestion of costuming as needed, and music as a part of the staging.” CTC will also extend tickets to the nine winning playwrights and their families for a dress rehearsal of *Our Town*, the first play of the regular season in Bratton.

“The idea of inviting a younger generation from our local communities to come to the grounds is so important,” Benesch concludes, “so that these students can see Chautauqua as part of their cultural heritage. We want these children and their parents to keep coming back. We are also grateful for the connection to the school districts and to Florida Studio Theatre, which helps us to be part of a larger educational and cultural web that we can further extend.”

All 160 student plays have also been entered into the Florida Studio Theatre Festival competition. So who knows, some Chautauqua County elementary student may also be headed for a premiere in Sarasota before the pilot season of the project is over.

## Duffy Endowment Brings Classical Guitar to Amp

**“A portable companion always ready to go where you go — a small friend weighing less than a fresh born infant — to be shared with few or many — just two of you in sweet meditation.”**

—From “The Guitar” (for Andrés Segovia) by Carl Sandburg

**F**or Arthur Duffy, taking up the classical guitar at age 82 was pure joy, a joy such as that expressed in Carl Sandburg’s poem honoring the eminent guitarist Andrés Segovia. At Sandburg’s request, Segovia once wrote out a lesson for the poet who was much better known for his distinctly American folk songs than any classical renderings on six strings.

Duffy, a metallurgical researcher turned real estate investor, and his wife Shirley, a former teacher, have been coming to Chautauqua from their home in Cleveland for many years — so many years they don’t quite remember the exact season when it became obvious that they needed to buy a house on the grounds. Their grandchildren, children, and the many friends they have introduced to Chautauqua over the years all seemed to want to visit in different weeks, and suddenly it made more sense to own a home than rent for just a few weeks.

“We think Chautauqua is such an enriching experience,” says Art, “the

programming is outstanding.” The couple does it all — the morning worship service, the 10:45 a.m. and 2 p.m. lectures, Special Studies classes, theater and the evening musical performances. “And we love the opera,” Shirley adds.

But with Art’s ever-growing love of the guitar — he had taken classes as a younger man, but gave it up in favor of his career — the Duffys decided they wanted to enrich the musical offerings at Chautauqua. “We thought there was a hole in the music program,” Art explains. “We think the classical repertoire for guitar is so rich and harmonious.”

And so, thanks to an endowment provided by the Duffy family, the pre-eminent American guitarist Sharon Isbin will take the stage in the Amphitheater on July 1 in the first solo performance by a single instrumentalist playing the guitar in the Institution’s history. Isbin is the director of the guitar department at the Aspen Music Festival, founder of the guitar department at The Juilliard School, and is a multiple Grammy Award winner. She began

studying guitar at age 9 and went on to earn degrees from the Yale School of Music. Isbin studied with Andrés Segovia and several other masters, and has performed around the world with more than 170 orchestras. She has commissioned more concerti than any living guitarist.

As if this were not enough, this season the Duffys will also bring another special friend to Chautauqua. Art’s guitar teacher James Marron, a faculty member at the University of Akron’s School of Music, will teach a Special Studies class in Week Seven. “He’s never been here,” says Art, who seems just as pleased to bring his teacher to the grounds as he is to help share the extraordinary music of Sharon Isbin with all of Chautauqua.

“I think Carl Sandburg got it right in that poem,” he concludes. Now Chautauquans will have a chance to experience the “sweet meditation” of guitarist and guitar in the Amp on special nights made possible by the Duffy’s endowment support.



Sharon Isbin

Submitted Photo

“We appreciate the initiative taken by the Duffys to bring this opportunity to all of us,” says Foundation CEO Geof Follansbee. “We look forward to supplementing musical programming in subsequent years by inviting classical guitarists to play with the MSFO, the CSO and other opportunities as they arise.”

# Chautauqua Clergy Leadership Program Launches with Support of Lilly Endowment

**T**en pastors will gather at the United Methodist House in mid-April for the inaugural seminar in the Chautauqua Clergy Leadership Program (CCLP). Funded by a generous, multi-year grant from the Lilly Endowment, the clergy — selected through a rigorous process — have committed to an intensive, two-year learning journey that will bring them to Chautauqua for six sessions over the next two years, including four off-season seminars and two full weeks during the summer seasons in 2015 and 2016.

Nominees for the program were recruited from 12 denominations in 13 northeastern and mid-Atlantic states, plus Washington, D.C. The final composition of the group was based on the goal of creating a socially, ecumenically, theologically and geographically diverse class of early-career ministers — men and women who have demonstrated a capacity and interest in serving not only the congregations to which they have been called, but as leaders in the communities where their churches are located.

“We looked for individuals who have been in the ministry for five to 10 years and are emerging as influential voices in their towns and cities, whether rural or urban,” explains Department of Religion director, the Rev. Dr. Robert M. Franklin. “These are ministers who understand that a part of their work is to be a voice of authority and conscience in the greater community — clergy who can step beyond the pulpit to engage with businesses, law enforcement, social services, nonprofits, government leaders and other citizen groups to tackle local problems and build partnerships for community improvement.”

Increasing their effectiveness as “clergy in the public square” as Franklin calls them, is the goal of the CCLP. Pastors completing the program will have built a common language around leadership theories, learned to frame difficult social and ethical issues with coherence, and mastered the skill of negotiating with groups and individuals across cultural, social, political and theological differences. The program also aims to grow a network of clergy who can call upon each other for support and advice in their day-to-day work.

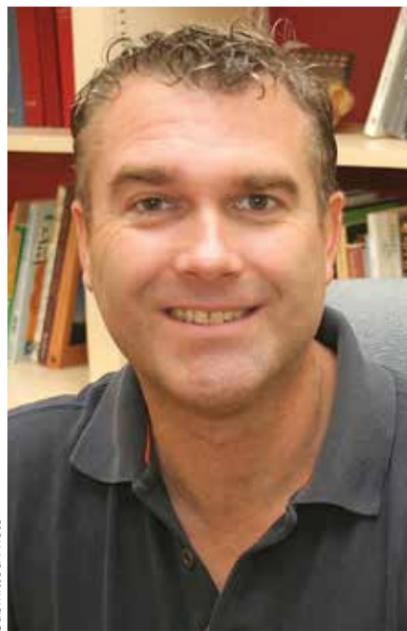
**“Beyond their intensive leadership development experience, we hope that CCLP participants will come away with relationships that will last for the rest of their lives, and that these individuals will develop bonds with Chautauqua on many levels.”**

—Derek Austin

## Program Leadership

The Rev. Dr. Derek Austin, ordained in both the United Church of Christ and the Disciples of Christ denominations, is designing and leading the Chautauqua program in collaboration with Franklin. In selecting the first group of ministers, Austin and Franklin were joined by Associate Director of Religion Maureen Rovegno, longtime Chautauquan the Rev. George B. Wirth — who retired in 2013 as pastor of Atlanta’s First Presbyterian Church — and the Rev. Claire W. Bamberg, who leads the Congregational Church of Plainville, Conn., and is a consultant with the Center for Progressive Renewal in Atlanta. This committee will continue to advise on the project.

“In the seminars, we want to cover all the angles of what it means to be an effective leader through pastoral ministry, prophetic ministry and the administrative aspects of church leadership,” explains Austin, who began working with Franklin to shape the program in May 2014. Over the last few summers, Austin had already stepped in to serve in several clerical positions at Chautauqua, including denominational chaplain for Chautauqua’s UCC and Disciples houses, and for gatherings of the Metropolitan Community Church group on the grounds. His introduction to the Institution, however, came seven years ago when he was selected to participate in Chautauqua’s interfaith New Clergy Program, another offering in the Department of Religion that grew out of the Institution’s Abrahamic



Submitted Photo

Initiative. As of September 2014, Austin also took on the leadership of the New Clergy Program, in addition to his duties with CCLP.

Raised in Albany, New York, Derek Austin lived most of his adult life in San Diego, California, and relocated to New England in 2005. With a bachelor’s degree in music and a master’s in education, he worked for seven years as a high school teacher and served as conductor of the San Diego Gay Men’s Chorus before pursuing a doctorate of ministry from San Francisco Theological Seminary. He then moved into what is known as “intentional transitional ministry,” a job that is the rough equivalent of a turnaround specialist in the corporate world.

Austin explains: “A big part of transitional ministry is helping churches rediscover or redefine themselves. My job has often been helping churches explore how they stay relevant or get in closer touch with their surrounding culture. As a transitional minister, I challenge the congregation to consider the ways they might need to embrace adaptive change. I act as a catalyst for that change, provide resources to assist them in that process, and then walk with them through it.” The assignment often involves strategic planning, visioning, conflict management and change management. “These are skills applicable to settled pastors, of course, who are moving their own congregations through transition,” he says.

Austin recently completed a transitional ministry position in

Connecticut and has been writing a book on the subject of the changing landscape of the mainline church. He says that in his new role with CCLP, he has been gratified by how determined the Lilly Endowment has been to support the directors of the various clergy leadership and renewal programs they are funding across the country. “Lilly is very committed to our success,” he says.

Intrigued by the extraordinary opportunities for learning across disciplines that Chautauqua provides, Lilly encouraged the Department of Religion to propose the development of a leadership program. “How do we identify, recruit and call forth a new generation of talented Christian pastors? How do we best prepare and train new ministers for effective and faithful pastoral leadership? How do we improve the skills and sustain the excellence of pastors currently serving congregations?” These are the questions that Lilly aims to address through its funding in the category of religion.

Chautauqua eagerly responded with a plan for two consecutive cohorts of pastors to take a deep dive into the study of leadership, each over a two-year period. As another part of their experience, the pastors will be paired with a mentor/coach, volunteers to be drawn from the accomplished business and civic leaders from around the world who are regulars on the grounds. Through occasional meetings by telephone and in person at Chautauqua, these mentor/coaches will help the clergy translate their leadership skills in the local congregation into a broader public context and strategize how best to bring their congregations along with them.

As Austin explains, “In Lilly’s exhaustive research on why pastors often give up the ministry within the first decade, one critical reason is a sense of professional isolation. Beyond their intensive leadership development experience, we hope that CCLP participants will come away with relationships that will last for the rest of their lives, and that these individuals will develop bonds with Chautauqua on many levels.”

During the 2015 season, the CCLP group will be in residence for the Week Nine theme, “Creating Livable Communities.”

# Stretching Toward Sustainability:

## JEFF AND SUZANNE WATTERS

Jeff and Suzanne Watters and their three children — Emily, 16, John, 13, and Betsy, 11 — live on Chautauqua's South end. It's a neighborhood set apart by the wooded ravine that runs under Thunder Bridge, the main pedestrian thoroughfare through the forest. The Watters family bought their fixer-upper on Whittier four years ago.

"Our neighbors rolled out the red carpet," says Jeff. "They hosted cocktail parties so we could get to know everyone. We felt immediately invited to belong here."

Now settled in their new digs, the pair say they've been struck by how many different ways that Chautauqua families — both renters and owners — define their deep connection to this place. "We love running and walking around the lake," Suzanne says. "I love to go to the VACI lectures and bring something back to the dinner table for family discussions. We also pretty much go every night at eight o'clock to the Amp for the concerts and vocal performances."

"The ability to do everything we want to do at summer camp and have all the educational and cultural events in addition — that is perfect for us," Jeff adds. "Chautauqua is so multi-dimensional, which is what makes it so special." The couple admits that their children are not always ready to go to as many cultural events as their parents are. They prefer Air Band and Club. "Sometimes it requires an ice cream bribe to get them to the Amp," Jeff explains.

The Watters family, who live in Pittsburgh in the off-season and are among those fortunate families who can spend the entire season at Chautauqua. Jeff works in Meadville, Pennsylvania, a 75-minute commute to Chautauqua,



Submitted Photo

John, Betsy and Emily Watters

which is about the same distance he drives to work when they are in Pittsburgh. He is president and CEO of Ainsworth Pet Nutrition, a pet food manufacturer.

As might be expected, the family includes a much-beloved English bulldog originally named Bulldozer. Soon after they moved into their Chautauqua cottage, a five-year-old neighbor began stopping by on her tricycle. She called the animal "Bark Dog," and the new name stuck. Suzanne laughs. "That was one of the many gifts our family has received from Chautauqua."

Suzanne grew up in Buffalo and came south every summer to stay on the opposite side of Chautauqua Lake. Her family generally came to the grounds one day out of each week when she was little, so she carried her own fond memories of the place, even as she and Jeff have lived in various spots around the country, including Connecticut, Maryland and California. When she and Jeff settled in Pittsburgh, she wanted to visit the Institution again.

For his part, Jeff was raised in Connecticut and the couple met right after college, during their

## THE 1874 SOCIETY

first week as brand-new employees of Kraft Foods. Suzanne worked for Kraft in sales and training for 10 years and then left when their first child was born. Throughout his career, Jeff has specialized in consumer-packaged goods and held positions at Kraft, Clorox, Heinz and Del Monte before he took the helm at Ainsworth.

Suzanne now spends her days as a working artist specializing in printmaking and teaches humanities classes as an adjunct professor at Robert Morris University. At Chautauqua, she occasionally brandishes her musical gifts on Bestor Plaza, playing guitar and singing with a fellow teacher from Special Studies. "We play folk music from the '60s and '70s," she explains, "so we get plenty of people who come over to sing along." The troubadours have been known to raise a nice chunk of change, which, like many other plaza performers, they gladly turn over to the Chautauqua Fund.

### Investing in the Future

This year, the Watters family also made a more significant donation to the Fund, joining the 1874 Society with a gift that qualified for the 3.2.1. matching gift opportunity, a challenge grant described in the last issue of *PILLARS*. With this grant, their donation was doubled by the Edward L. Anderson, Jr. Foundation as part of an effort to broaden and enlarge the number of regular, leadership gifts to the Chautauqua Fund.

"We had been in conversation with [Chautauqua Fund director] Tina Downey about how we could give back financially," Jeff explains. "Suzanne, of course, has given repeatedly to the Institution by teaching arts classes in Special Studies, but it seemed like an ideal time for us to step up as part of the emerging generation of donors to stretch our gift this past year."

They are interested in Chautauqua's potential to reach a broader and more diverse audience and want to contribute to the Institution's sustainability. "You know, on a selfish level," Jeff says, "the way Chautauqua is structured has worked just fine for our family. But as a guy who has spent my life building global brands, I know Chautauqua could be so much more. To that end, I am fully supportive of a more expansive and ambitious agenda for the Institution and would like to see Chautauqua insert itself in national and international dialogue on the issues of our time. It's a natural vehicle for that, but a change of this nature will require us to share this special place with a broader audience — on the grounds, by digital means, and off the grounds."

"I love my relatively undiscovered cocoon here, but I also recognize that to be sustainable, we have to build out our revenue base. One way we can do that is by being more engaged and assertive, which will attract new attention to Chautauqua and, in turn, attract others that will add to the already rich and diverse Chautauqua experience."

# A New Generation Supports the Sharp Lecture Endowment

**“Having the financial support from a family to put together an entire week of diverse voices is a powerful gift.”**

—Robert Franklin

Sisters Pam Hemminger of Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and Lisa Jackson, of Atlanta, are devotees of the Chautauqua Symphony Orchestra and regulars at the lectures in the Amp and the Hall of Philosophy. Their trips to the grounds — usually for at least two weeks every season — are the primary chance for their families to visit during the year. They come together in a house on North Lake Drive that their aunt once owned and which they eventually bought to share with their children and husbands.

Their Chautauqua connection runs deep. Pam and Lisa’s beloved grandmother, Emma Ochiltree Sharp, of Pittsburgh, had first come to Chautauqua as a child with her great aunt Elizabeth, a devoted Presbyterian whose association with the Institution went back to the era when steamboats chugged up the lake carrying groups of dedicated preachers and Sunday School teachers clad in impractical hats and long skirts, eager to disembark at Fair Point.

In her newlywed years, Emma in turn introduced Chautauqua to her husband, H. Parker Sharp, a Harvard graduate and Pittsburgh attorney who would eventually serve as general counsel to Jones and Laughlin Steel Corporation. Though Parker Sharp enjoyed Chautauqua as much as his wife, he never wanted to own a house on the grounds, Pam explains. Nevertheless, he and Emma saw to it that their children and grandchildren had the full Chautauqua experience for at least a month each summer. For many years, the family rented the McCredie cottage high on the bluff that now overlooks the Coyle Tennis Courts and Turney Sailing Center.

Parker Sharp loved gardening, birds, and especially the music at Chautauqua. He was also a pipe organ enthusiast. In 1993, the Sharps were among the four families that helped pay for the 86-year-old Massey Organ to be dismantled, repaired, rebuilt and reinstalled in the Amphitheater. When Parker died the next year, his daughter and son-in-law bought a house on the grounds to ensure that Parker’s widow Emma could still keep up her summer residency.

Pam says she will never forget Old First Night in 2004 when her

grandmother was thrilled to be honored as the Chautauquan present in the Amp that evening holding the longest continuous attendance record of 95 years. Her grandmother faithfully maintained lifelong friendships at Chautauqua and never missed a CSO concert. “The symphony was her passion, and we always had to dress for the concerts when we went with her,” Pam says, smiling. Emma Sharp passed away in 2006.

Six years later, on a bright summer day, granddaughters Pam and Lisa saw a notice in *The Chautauquan Daily* that the Hall of Philosophy lecture that day was being sponsored by the H. Parker and Emma O. Sharp Lectureship in the Department of Religion. They were stunned. They had never heard about this element of their grandparents’ legacy at Chautauqua. They immediately decided to attend the program to learn more.

Endowing a platform lecture is one of the longest-standing vehicles for support of Institution programming. The practice dates back to 1970 and has played a major, ongoing role in ensuring the quality and stature of featured speakers. As most Chautauquans know, the 10:45 a.m. lectures in the Amp are curated by the Department of Education. For the 2 p.m. talks in the Hall of Philosophy, the Department of Religion manages invitations to a broad spectrum of preachers, teachers and scholars, whose compensation is often dependent on donor support.

“Our vision is to expose Chautauquans to the finest theological scholarship in the world,” says Department of Religion Director Robert Franklin, “and it takes considerable resources and good stewardship to remain on the leading edge. Covering our speakers’ honoraria and travel (which is sometimes international) is only feasible with support from many Chautauqua families.”

## A Family’s Commitment

Pam Hemminger, who has served as a county commissioner and financial adviser to many social service and environmental nonprofits back home in Chapel Hill, was immediately interested to find out how she



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**H. Parker and Emma Sharp**

and Lisa could bolster the Sharp family lectureship going forward. Advancing her grandparents’ hopes for the fund while also ensuring a diversity of voices on the lecture platform is a primary goal, she says.

On the afternoon that Pam and Lisa first learned of the family endowment, the speaker was Joan Halifax, a Zen Buddhist monk who is also an anthropologist and hospice caregiver. Halifax was being interviewed in that session by radio host Krista Tippett for her nationally broadcast radio show and podcast, “On Being.” Tippett and Halifax talked about empathy as a key component in the practice of medicine and caregiving — a subject both sisters had experienced first hand in caring for their grandmother and their mother, Sally Adams, who passed away the same year as Emma Sharp.

The sisters hope to increase the Sharp endowment to a level sufficient to fund an entire week of lectures — a concept that Robert Franklin is excited to imagine. “I like to think of each of the nine weeks in the season as a virtual course in theology,” he says. “In my remarks in the Hall of Philosophy at the beginning of each theme week, I try to provide an overview of the ‘curriculum’ ahead as it relates to religion, ethics, and spirituality. Then at the end of the week, I offer a summary of what has been brought forward and encourage Chautauquans to find ways to go

deeper on the topic. Having the financial support from a family to put together an entire week of diverse voices is a powerful gift.”

Franklin notes that to remain relevant, programming in the religion department must take account of the increasing percentage of Americans (Chautauquans included) who claim no formal religious affiliation but who may nonetheless be on a spiritual quest and hope to have many questions answered here. “The religion department seeks to reach beyond denominational and religious categories to include humanist voices, agnostic voices and others who have a vision of how to order our lives and conduct our economic affairs. Not all the best minds and practitioners of various faith traditions are in the United States, either,” Franklin notes. “We need to be in dialogue with thought leaders from around the globe.”

## Taking Ownership

“Of course Chautauqua is still Old World, and you have to want that experience,” Pam Hemminger says. “We don’t use a TV at Chautauqua. I feel more creative and relaxed there. I take classes to meet new people and learn new things. And it’s funny, even though I live in North Carolina, it was at Chautauqua that I first saw Clay Aiken and Scotty McCreary (both North Carolinians) in performance. Back home, I have little pieces of Chautauqua all over my house; a mailbox from the old post office, pieces of art we’ve picked up over the years, some furniture from the Old Baker Hotel.”

For the descendants of Parker and Emma Sharp, there is fresh delight in seeing how the family thread continues to be woven into the fabric at Chautauqua and to explore how they can continue their elders’ investment in the Institution. Pam Hemminger says that for the first time this year, her 24-year-old son wants to bring a serious girlfriend to Chautauqua. Meanwhile, her daughter Carly, a senior at the University of North Carolina, is usually wearing her bell tower necklace. “It’s fun to watch my kids take ownership of the place,” she says.



**“The main reason we come is for our kids. The older boys have Club all day — sailing, dodgeball, canoeing, kayaking. They are free to be kids. And it doesn’t hurt to remember it’s 109 degrees in Las Vegas while we’re here.”**

—Michael O’Brien

## Doing Whatever It Takes: MICHAEL AND ELYSHA O’BIEN

Opting to be away from their primary homes and habits for a week or more at a time, many Chautauquans rearrange their lives or travel great distances to reach the westernmost tip of New York state. They choose to invest themselves in pursuits a bit more demanding than say, sitting on a beach towel beside the ocean and calling it a vacation. But for Michael and Elysha O’Brien, coming to Chautauqua for eight weeks with their three sons has been possible only with an extraordinary degree of commitment and determination.

The O’Brien family lives in Las Vegas, where Elysha, who has a Ph.D. in literacy, teaches part-time at the College of Southern Nevada. Michael launched his career in finance and accounting and after several years left the profession to become a high school math teacher. The move, he says, was necessary to free up his summers for the family pilgrimage to Chautauqua.

While they are here, both O’Briens teach on the grounds to earn their gate passes. Elysha offers Special Studies classes and is part of the faculty team in the Youth Writing Camp. Michael served as co-commissioner of the men’s softball league this past season.

“We sacrifice all year long to save \$1,000 a month,” Michael says. “We could spend it on a week in Hawaii or all summer at Chautauqua.” He grins. Back home, the O’Brien children are fortunate to have their grandparents close by, which also saves on child care expenses.

“We realize that most people our age can’t get here for the whole season,” Elysha says. However, the couple’s devotion to Chautauqua goes beyond their commitment

to spending the summer away from Nevada. They are active in the NOW Generation group for younger Chautauquans, give regularly to the Chautauqua Fund as members of the Lewis Miller Circle, and make an annual tithe to the Department of Religion.

### Innovating Youth Programs

In addition to their financial contributions, Elysha and Michael have been ardent advocates for more youth classes through the Special Studies program. In looking toward the 2015 season, Elysha has worked with Matt Ewalt, Chautauqua’s associate director of education and youth services, to grow the Youth Scholar Camp for ages 10 to 14.

This year, the offerings will expand from a four-week morning program to a six-week morning and afternoon program. Class topics range from “Postmodern Picturebooks, Graphic Novels and the Internet” and “What in the World is Going On?” to “Artistic Mathematics” and “The Secrets of Cryptography.” In between classes, interested camp participants will join Michael and Shayne Cokerdam, another teacher in the Youth Scholar program, at the morning lecture, with tentative plans for a lunch discussion to follow. Elysha will also join other instructors to once again offer the Chautauqua Youth Writing Camp for ages 13 to 16 during Week Five of the 2015 season.

Both youth camps are part of a larger Institution effort this year to present Special Studies opportunities alongside Boys’ and Girls’ Club as another way for youth to explore Chautauqua on their own, challenge themselves, pursue their interests, and make new friends.

“There is perhaps no finer day camp in America than our Boys’ and Girls’ Club,” says Ewalt, “but we want to make sure Chautauqua is just as attractive a summer destination for those kids who may prefer building robots, discussing literature or learning a foreign language. I’m incredibly grateful to the O’Briens for their work in building our youth programs, work that is so clearly rooted in their love of Chautauqua and all that this place can offer families.”

Elysha has also been a devoted Christian since she was a teenager, and loves learning about different faith traditions. This past season at Chautauqua she attended a Shabbat service at Miller Park and a Spanish language film at the Everett Jewish Life Center. She’s also a regular at the Sacred Song Service and is devoted to the 2 p.m. lectures — that is, when she can fit them around her teaching duties. Elysha has also been engaged with the Knitting4Peace group and completed her CLSC certificate in 2010.

“The best speakers to me are the pastors,” she says. “At Chautauqua I am allowed to be curious about other faith traditions, and I love the range of ages here and Chautauqua’s strong spiritual core.”

For his part, Michael was raised Catholic in Buffalo and first came to Chautauqua as a child. He attended Children’s School and then Club until he was 10. He later returned as a teenager, a couple of years after he’d already met Elysha. They started dating at age 18. “One season after Mike graduated from school, we lived over a garage in Mayville and worked on the grounds,” Elysha recalls. Later, the children were born. “We had a few summers at home then,” she says.

“But by the summer when Mikey was 5, Gabe was 3, and Joey was

5 months old, we actually drove to Chautauqua without a place to stay. We found an apartment where the renters had fallen through, and we got it for 10 days,” Michael says.

The O’Briens have made it back to Chautauqua every year since for a minimum of six weeks. “The main reason we come is for our kids,” Michael continues. “The older boys have Club all day — sailing, dodgeball, canoeing, kayaking. They are free to be kids. And it doesn’t hurt to remember it’s 109 degrees in Las Vegas while we’re here.” He laughs.

“We live in Sin City,” he continues, only half-joking. “I want our children to have this experience as long as we can manage it and as long as they want to come.” Michael notes that in the coming year their eldest son, his namesake, will be 12, and that means saving for another gate ticket; they also want Joey, their youngest, to experience Club when he comes of age. Michael notes that all three boys will likely need braces, too.

“And it’s only five years until the first one goes to college,” Elysha chimes in. “But we will find a way to make it happen.”

# Volunteering for the Promise:

## BOB PICKENS

**P**romise Campaign volunteer Dr. Robert L. Pickens is a board-certified urologist who practiced for 40 years at the University Medical Center of Princeton. He served on the board of trustees for 24 years and was the founding chairman of the Biomedical Ethics Committee at the medical center. Dr. Pickens was clinical assistant professor of surgery at the Robert Wood Johnson Medical School in New Brunswick, N.J. Although now retired from clinical practice, he continues to serve on the Physician Development Committee of the Princeton Healthcare System Foundation. During the 2014 season, Bob sat down with PILLARS to talk about his work as a Promise Campaign volunteer.

In 1965, my wife Mary and I were married, and I became a Chautauquan. Her great-great-grandfather, William Hamilton Shortt, was a Pennsylvania state legislator and was one of the early trustees of the Institution. In our cottage, we have a picture of him with Chautauqua founders Lewis Miller and John Heyl Vincent. From this long relationship, our 10 grandchildren are now seventh-generation, highly enthusiastic, Chautauquans.

It gives me great joy to support the Foundation's work. What Chautauqua stands for — the emphasis on values and lifelong learning — is extremely important

**“Where the national conversation tends to focus on the individual, Chautauqua emphasizes community. These ideals are what I want to preserve for our children and grandchildren.”**

—Bob Pickens

to our family. Where the national conversation tends to focus on the individual, Chautauqua emphasizes community. These ideals are what I want to preserve for our children and grandchildren.

If I were trying to explain Chautauqua to a new visitor, I'd take them to Bestor Plaza. They would see children playing around the fountains, people of all ages on their way to a lecture or a concert, and all of this as part of the multi-generational community. Our porches are a part of the Chautauqua experience, encouraging conversations and greetings to those passing by. Children are able to walk by themselves ... to the library or to buy a loaf of bread at the Farmers Market.

Years ago, Mary and I started as Chautauqua Fund volunteers and eventually progressed to team captains, overseeing the work of

a team of volunteers. In 2009, we accepted the role of co-chairs of the annual Chautauqua Fund and served for three years. I am now working on the Promise Campaign and promoting opportunities for individuals to give to endowment, capital improvements or to make a bequest.

Although these are critical to the success of the campaign, I still feel an important part of my job is to educate people about the annual Chautauqua Fund and the important role it plays in the life of the Institution. The Fund helps underwrite the Institution's yearly operating expenses. Revenue from gate tickets pays for less than half of Chautauqua's annual budget. Generous philanthropy, through the Chautauqua Fund, must help to bridge that gap each year.

This past 2014 season, I enjoyed looking at the Promise posters around the grounds. Chautauqua is about people in the community interacting with speakers and performers who have come over the decades to share their ideas and talents. That is what you see in the interesting collages of people, a tremendous sense of history and an excitement about the future.



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