On Annual Fund Day this past season, Chautauqua Fund Director Tina Downey announced a most generous pledge from the Edward L. Anderson, Jr. Foundation — a $100,000 challenge grant that invites donors to make new leadership commitments to the Chautauqua Fund, which will in turn be multiplied by funds from the Anderson Foundation. The challenge, which extends through the end of 2014, applies to new members joining the Bestor Society, the 1874 Society, and the NOW Generation (Chautauquans between the ages of 21 and 40) who join the Lewis Miller Circle. Here’s how it works:

- New donors to the Lewis Miller Circle join with a gift of at least $250, and that gift will be tripled by the Anderson Foundation, so the impact of the contribution is $1,000.
- New members of the 1874 Society join with a minimum gift of $1,374, and that gift is doubled.
- New members of the Bestor Society join with a minimum gift of $3,500, and that gift is matched dollar for dollar.

“Steve and Dave Anderson, the sons of longtime Chautauquan Ed Anderson, Jr. have given us the biggest opportunity that we’ve ever had to encourage new donors to join the leadership societies or to increase their commitment to the next leadership level of giving,” Downey explains. “The Chautauqua Fund is an annually critical component filling the gap between gate ticket revenues and the actual operating cost of the Institution.”

Foundation CEO Geof Follansbee elaborates: “The Fund allows the Institution to continue to enhance the overall Chautauqua experience each year. Some of these recent innovations have included developing new partnerships with peer institutions such as National Geographic and Colonial Williamsburg. The Fund also supports the development and deepening of our relationships with critical thinkers from around the world who come to the grounds to speak, as well as our efforts to weave the lecture themes into programming beyond the Amp lectures including new arts experiences that resonate with the themes.”

The Anderson Challenge:

LIFT YOUR GIFT TO THE CHQ FUND

改善了的Chautauqua体验：

详情和挑战

It’s the little things that can make a big difference in someones Chautauqua experience, and it starts with the purchase of a gate ticket. That’s why Karen Williams, the Institution’s new customer experience manager, spent her first season in the new position working at the Main Gate.

Some of the initial improvements have been small but significant, says Williams. When someone calls the ticket line, they will hear the Chautauqua Symphony Orchestra if they are put on hold. Another new policy makes day passes available for purchase at any time, not just on the day they will be used. Williams and Christina Marsh, Heirloom Restaurant dining room manager, developed preferred language for the ticketing, gate and food service areas to ensure that guests are treated with a certain kind of propriety.

“We have high school and college students working here in the summer,” says Williams, “and they tend to have a more relaxed, informal language, but many of our guests come from a different generation. So we are encouraging the staff when receiving a ‘thank you’ from someone to respond with something like ‘my pleasure’ rather than ‘no problem.’” Other phrases such as referring to a couple or family as “you guys” have also been discouraged, she says.

She has also implemented an employee recognition program at the ticketing, gate and food service areas to increase their commitment to the next leadership level of giving,” Downey explains. “The Chautauqua Fund is an annually critical component filling the gap between gate ticket revenues and the actual operating cost of the Institution.”

Foundation CEO Geof Follansbee elaborates: “The Fund allows the Institution to continue to enhance the overall Chautauqua experience each year. Some of these recent innovations have included developing new partnerships with peer institutions such as National Geographic and Colonial Williamsburg. The Fund also supports the development and deepening of our relationships with critical thinkers from around the world who come to the grounds to speak, as well as our efforts to weave the lecture themes into programming beyond the Amp lectures including new arts experiences that resonate with the themes.”

The Fund is a critical component of the $98.2 million Promise Campaign — it represents a goal of $22 million in annual gifts over the life of the campaign. To date, more than $13 million has been raised toward that total.

Karen Williams in her office. The trophies are part of her staff recognition program.

seasoned Chautauquans to help her see gaps. “Most of the people who come through these gates are professionals in some kind of business, either active or retired, and they apply their business acumen when talking to me about what they feel need to happen,” she says.

Williams has also been tracking new Chautauquans as they navigate the Institution for the first time. “We want to find out what they are asking for. Can they find what they need? Are they getting where they want to go? Once they are in their accommodations, do they have what they need to best utilize their time and fully acclimate to being here?”

As Williams points out, it is easy for a newcomer to be overwhelmed with the volume of opportunities, the scale of the grounds, and the variety of possible destinations. Williams is working with others on the marketing staff to evaluate current visitor orientation practices, and she has met with a number of first-time visitors in focus groups. These meetings have included people who come to the grounds alone and those who come with families.

Another fundamental concern in Williams’ new portfolio of tasks is transportation from the parking lots to the Main Gate. “How can we improve that experience within the
**CHALLENGE from page 1**

"Gifts of all sizes to the Chautauqua Fund are important and deeply appreciated," Downey continues. 

"Every community member should understand that as a nonprofit educational organization Chautauqua is dependent on each of us to make an extra investment to create the best possible Chautauqua experience for everyone. The Andersons have been longtime supporters of the Institution. They underwrite the Scholar-in-Residence Program and have given an important boost to the School of Dance, helping to recruit male dancers with generous scholarships. We are so grateful for this infusion of energy and motivation into the Campaign."

In return, leadership gifts to the Chautauqua Fund provide special benefits to society members, including invitations to select events, tours and programs, and an annual subscription to Pillars.

The Anderson family began their long association with Chautauqua in the early 1970s, when the late Dick Bechtolt invited the family to come to the grounds. Bechtolt, who served on the Foundation Board for many years, had been Anderson’s roommate when they were undergraduates at the University of Chicago. Ed Anderson, who spent most of his career as an investment analyst, was an original member of "The Graham Group" with Warren Buffett. Before his investment career, Ed earned a doctorate in chemistry from Washington State University and worked for the Atomic Energy Commission. He also had a keen interest in literacy, education and childhood development.

His son Steve remembers the family’s first foray to Chautauqua and his experience of Children's School in 1973 at the age of 4. "We stayed in the old Keystone Hotel for many years," he remembers, "and I learned to ride a bike on those grounds."

In the 1980s, Steve’s older brother Dave became a Boys’ Club counselor. Both are still coming to Chautauqua with their children. "It’s the one time our families get together every year," Steve says. Dave lives outside Boston and is a general partner in the investment group Anbec Partners. Prior to Anbec, he was president and CEO of Headsprout, an education technology company that he founded with his father. Dave earned a degree in economics from the University of Chicago and an M.B.A from the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University.

Steve, who earned a Ph.D. in entomology, worked for many years as a wildlife biologist. In that role, he assisted the San Diego Zoo with its captive breeding programs for bears and wolves, worked with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the National Park Service in Hawaii, and conducted numerous projects with the Nature Conservancy in North Carolina, Wyoming and California. Now he is a CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER™ with Navion Financial Advisors in Davis, California. Like his father, Steve wanted to take his analytical skills from the study of science into a different realm.

"And throughout it all Chautauqua has been home," says Steve. "I watched my own son learn to ride his bike in front of the Keystone (now converted to condos) where we own a place. And not so long ago, just like my dad, I followed about 400 yards behind my son as he rode off solo to Club for the first time on that bike."

Steve says he also developed his deep appreciation for the arts from his father. "Dad was a cultural sponge his whole life. Any time we could get there, he took us to Broadway. I’ve seen almost all the classic opera with him. He also loved dance and treasured his friendship with Jean-Pierre Bonnefoux and Patricia McBride at Chautauqua. Up until the end of his life Dad stayed in touch with [New York City Ballet soloist and principal dancer] Daniel Ulbricht and offered to let Daniel stay at our place whenever he was on the grounds to teach at the School of Dance."

With these shared family interests at the fore, Ed Anderson established his foundation to focus on arts, education and the environment.

"Dad was a Warren Buffett-style philanthropist," Steve says. "He did not believe in 'the divine lottery of the womb.' He laughed. ‘He left us a small share of his estate, but 95 percent went into the charitable foundation. We were looking for a way to leverage a larger gift to the Chautauqua Fund and to inspire giving from new donors.’"

Chautauquans who want to take advantage of the Anderson 3–2 Challenge can contact Tina Downey at tdowney@ciseb.org or 716-357-6406.

---


"Chautauqua is such an economic driver for this region and we want to make sure that it is strong, sustainable and viable."

—Karen Williams

"Chautauqua is such an economic driver for this region and we want to make sure that it is strong, sustainable and viable," she says. Enhancing Chautauqua’s role in regional economic development is another part of Williams’ personal motivation to excel in her new job.

"We want to be the employer that people want to work for — that’s the best of the best," she says. Toward this goal Williams is developing a thoughtful approach to interviewing, hiring, bringing new employees on board, and providing them with a thorough immersion in all things Chautauqua. She wants staff to understand the hierarchy of needs that people bring to the grounds and to understand the standards Chautauqua aims to deliver.

Williams notes that in years past there have been two cultures at work among staff — that of year-round employees (approximately 90 individuals) and the culture of seasonal employees (over 1,500). Bringing both groups into the same ethos of service is critical to the Institution’s success, she says. In part, it’s as simple as learning to make eye contact with people, using the right language, asking the right questions about what people want. But the culture must also involve every staff member understanding Chautauqua’s values, its mission and vision, and the importance of continuous learning. Williams hopes to develop some mini-courses online for staff and exploring other ways to use technology to help the whole team understand the 140-year-old Institution and its place in American history.

Williams is hoping to partner with Jamestown Community College and SUNY Fredonia through their existing courses designed to deliver and enhance students’ career and leadership skills. The idea is to encourage local students who work on the grounds to be part of a mentoring program that will provide career critical skills “so when they enter the job market, they have a leg up on the competition that we and our customers will stay with us over a period of years," Williams says. "I’ve learned from returning employees of all ages, once you’re here, it’s in your heart and you want to come back.”

Remarkably, even with all these assignments, Williams still finds time for gardening and competitive swimming. She lives five minutes from the grounds and confesses that one of her fantasies is to water ski home from work.

"I give Chautauqua a lot of credit for knowing how important customer service is,” Williams says. “The programming and opportunities here are phenomenal, and if we can drive volume, we can drive sustainability. As I tell staff every chance I get, everybody benefits when guests come back.”

During the off-season, Williams will be working with all departments in developing an approach and customer service plan. “Establishing a vision, roadmap, and department ownership will be my priority as we think about 2015 and beyond,” she concludes.
FROM THE CEO

GEOF FOLLANSBEE

Annuals and Perennials

I’m not much of a gardener, but it seems that planting is an appropriate metaphor for the impact of philanthropy at Chautauqua. Some gifts are annual; others are perennial. Both are essential. The annual Chautauqua Fund is like the marigolds in the flower boxes and circular beds on Bestor Plaza. They only last a season and have to be replanted every June, just as gifts to the Chautauqua Fund must be renewed each year because they fill the gap between gate ticket revenues and the costs associated with a single season. In fact, these annual funds help pay for those marigolds and countless other amenities that contribute to the full Chautauqua experience.

The Promise Campaign, on the other hand, provides a means for donors to make perennial gifts — investments that will bloom repeatedly for many, many years. For example, our endowed scholarship funds help to bring a new crop of emerging artists to the grounds each year. These young talents are immersed in professional development activities alongside their counterparts from other disciplines, and they have the rare opportunity to perform for a sophisticated and appreciative audience while still in their apprentice years.

Likewise, Chautauqua’s endowed lecture funds ensure that the Institution has the perennial means to secure speakers of the first rank to address the topics that emerge as we plan our theme weeks. These endowment funds, seeded by many families over many years, are combined to provide us with many varieties of experts and viewpoints.

Now, through The Promise Campaign, we are seeking additional endowment resources that will help maintain and preserve our buildings — 100 of them in total, both historic and recent. And, we are pursuing new resources in the form of endowed chairs to ensure — well into the 21st century — our capacity to identify, hire, and retain leaders of the caliber of artistic and programmatic talent that we now enjoy.

These leaders are the chief cultivators of the arts at Chautauqua, and it is no exaggeration to suggest that they are also helping to shape the larger artistic landscape in this country and beyond. They work diligently to nurture and train the future performers who will serve in orchestras, dance troupes, and theater and opera companies around the globe. As a result of their efforts, we have become accustomed to reading about Chautauqua Theater Company veterans popping up regularly on Broadway, or dancers such as Daniel Ulbricht, who came to Chautauqua as a very young dance student and is now an occasional choreographer/teacher for us in addition to his duties as a principal in the New York City Ballet.

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. The inter-arts collaborations — The Romeo & Juliet Project and this season’s Go West! — have brought into focus the breadth of Chautauqua’s artistic powers while also tacitly suggesting the greater possibilities for technological and physical enhancements in the Amphitheater. The inter-arts donors listed in this issue of Pillars have made these events possible and have thus tilled a path toward even greater levels of artistic achievement in the reconstructed Amp. Some $5.5 million must yet be raised to commence the construction phase of this project, and we hope by the end of this calendar year that many Chautauquans might be moved to pitch in toward this goal.

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.

Enough of the extended horticultural metaphor, but gardening has been much on my mind this season following the tragic loss of Ryan Kiblin, Chautauqua’s gardens, grounds and landscaping manager, who succumbed to a sudden illness in the eighth month of her first pregnancy this July. Neither mother nor daughter could be saved, and the loss shook the ground under our feet as did the tragic violence that took Mary Whitaker from our symphony and community just five weeks later.

Ryan was a perfect example of the kind of steady growth and promise that Chautauqua can provide to those who engage with this Institution. She began here as a 19-year-old who had been struggling to find work in Chautauqua County’s tough job market. Ryan soon found her calling under the mentorship of Director of Operations Doug Conroe as the two worked closely together to undertake the beginnings of a new stormwater management system with strategically placed rain gardens around the grounds. Ryan also got involved in studying and diagnosing the health of Chautauqua’s eldest trees. Along with consultant Dean Gowan, she helped to plan the rehabilitation of the area around Thunder Bridge after a windstorm toppled a number of beloved giants.

Ryan brought a fresh eye to our garden spaces, insisting on plantings native to the region. She loved butterflies and the color purple. That is why her devoted grounds crew members assembled in the Hall of Philosophy for her memorial service wearing purple ties. Fittingly, the next day they were back in their dungarees, watering, pulling weeds and putting the finishing touches on the new, 400-yard-long site behind Norton Hall and the contiguous Janet F. and Arthur C. Levan Sr. Garden, which was a source of great pride for Ryan. A fanciful brick walkway and a crushed limestone nature trail wander there through brand new plantings that include 50 native trees, 1,500 perennials, and 300 shrubs, all arranged to filter excess nitrogen and phosphorus from storm water. As Ryan explained to a Daily reporter during the first week of the 2014 season: “It’s good, in a way, to work on things during the season because it shows people what we’re doing and gets them more involved. More people comment and question that way.” Spoken like a true Chautauquan.

Though her years were cut short, Ryan Kiblin’s promise is still unfolding. She is with us in every patch of color on the grounds and in every visit from passing butterflies. She, too, is among the perennials. We stand in her gardens and give thanks for her gifts to us. As you will see on page 11, the community is already stepping forward to preserve the memory of Ryan and Mary.
That’s what Chautauqua is like for me. The energy is infectious. The expression “takes one to know one” applies here. Stephanie Dawson is herself a powerhouse, and her discovery of Chautauqua has been a great fit for her family, but she says she’s just getting started.

“I first came here four years ago with my husband, our two children, and my husband’s parents,” she explains. “We flew in. When we got to the grounds I said, ‘Sofld. Done.’ I liked everything about it.”

Dawson grew up outside Atlanta in a family that encouraged her musical talents. She began taking violin lessons at age 10 and voice lessons at age 11. Dawson’s parents are longtime Chautauquans.

Stephanie realized quickly that Chautauqua would be an avenue for her daughters Isabelle and Josephine to have an early, hands-on exposure to the arts — a high priority to her and her husband Michael, who is a global tactical solutions manager with AIG. Michael’s parents, John and Christine Dawson, are longtime Chautauquans.

Stephanie has also thrown herself into volunteer work on the grounds, sharing parenting duties with her husband, our two children, and our 99-year-old grandmother. “She instilled in me the importance of community,” she says. And she’d like to help bring more people to Chautauqua — the older and younger generations connecting, but it’s not so accessible in the ‘burbs in a neighborhood where everyone knew everyone, and if you got in trouble, everybody’s parents were looking out for you. Chautauqua reminds me of that, and I think that’s why my grandmother was also so instantly connected here. As an adult I appreciate even more how she instilled in me the importance of community.”

“When my kids are bigger and more independent,” she says, “I hope to be more involved in the work of the Chautauqua Foundation.”

“I want to give a donation every year as we are able, so when I am old and my kids are running things, they can do the same. There is no place like Chautauqua, but I wish there were more places like it.”

— Stephanie Dawson

The NOW Generation is open to all members of the community ages 21–40. Led by an Advisory Council chaired by John Haskell and staffed by Megan Sorenson at the Foundation, it provides an unprecedented menu of opportunities for younger Chautauquans to connect, network, socialize and volunteer. On the Saturday after July 4th, young Chautauquans and their families gathered at the waterfront for “Summer Fest” with live music, pizza, and volleyball.

The annual NOW Gen President’s Reception was held at the Golf Club to provide timely updates on programming, youth initiatives, and an open forum for Q-and-A with the Advisory Council and administration.

Throughout the season the NOW Generation also hosted a variety of events for its members and the community, including porch events with wine and tapas, ice cream socials, a special gallery reception, and a World Cup viewing party. Members were treated to discounts on tickets to The May Queen (a CTC world premiere), and kept “in the know” on the group’s Facebook page (www.facebook.com/NOWGenCHQ) regarding volunteer opportunities with the inter-arts collaboration and a chance to be an extra in this year’s production of Madam Butterfly, which Stephanie Dawson couldn’t resist.

For more information on NOW Generation activities, or to subscribe to the NOW Gen e-newsletter (and receive updates and invitations to upcoming events, including regional gatherings held throughout the off-season), please contact Megan Sorenson, staff liaison, at msorenson@ciweb.org / 716-357-6243.

**JUST GETTING STARTED**

**Stephanie Dawson:**

“You know how, if you get too close to a power line, you can hear the electricity?” Stephanie Dawson asks.

“That’s what Chautauqua is like for me. The energy is infectious. The expression ‘takes one to know one’ applies here. Stephanie Dawson is herself a powerhouse, and her discovery of Chautauqua has been a great fit for her family, but she says she’s just getting started.

“I first came here four years ago with my husband, our two children, and my husband’s parents,” she explains. “We flew in. When we got to the grounds I said, ‘Sofld. Done.’ I liked everything about it.”

Dawson grew up outside Atlanta in a family that encouraged her musical talents. She began taking violin lessons at age 10 and voice lessons at age 11. Dawson’s parents are longtime Chautauquans.

Stephanie realized quickly that Chautauqua would be an avenue for her daughters Isabelle and Josephine to have an early, hands-on exposure to the arts — a high priority to her and her husband Michael, who is a global tactical solutions manager with AIG. Michael’s parents, John and Christine Dawson, are longtime Chautauquans.

Stephanie has also thrown herself into volunteer work on the grounds, sharing parenting duties with her husband, our two children, and our 99-year-old grandmother. “She instilled in me the importance of community,” she says. And she’d like to help bring more people to Chautauqua — the older and younger generations connecting, but it’s not so accessible in the ‘burbs in a neighborhood where everyone knew everyone, and if you got in trouble, everybody’s parents were looking out for you. Chautauqua reminds me of that, and I think that’s why my grandmother was also so instantly connected here. As an adult I appreciate even more how she instilled in me the importance of community.”

“When my kids are bigger and more independent,” she says, “I hope to be more involved in the work of the Chautauqua Foundation.”

“I want to give a donation every year as we are able, so when I am old and my kids are running things, they can do the same. There is no place like Chautauqua, but I wish there were more places like it.”

— Stephanie Dawson

The NOW Generation is open to all members of the community ages 21–40. Led by an Advisory Council chaired by John Haskell and staffed by Megan Sorenson at the Foundation, it provides an unprecedented menu of opportunities for younger Chautauquans to connect, network, socialize and volunteer. On the Saturday after July 4th, young Chautauquans and their families gathered at the waterfront for “Summer Fest” with live music, pizza, and volleyball.

The annual NOW Gen President’s Reception was held at the Golf Club to provide timely updates on programming, youth initiatives, and an open forum for Q-and-A with the Advisory Council and administration.

Throughout the season the NOW Generation also hosted a variety of events for its members and the community, including porch events with wine and tapas, ice cream socials, a special gallery reception, and a World Cup viewing party. Members were treated to discounts on tickets to The May Queen (a CTC world premiere), and kept “in the know” on the group’s Facebook page (www.facebook.com/NOWGenCHQ) regarding volunteer opportunities with the inter-arts collaboration and a chance to be an extra in this year’s production of Madam Butterfly, which Stephanie Dawson couldn’t resist.

For more information on NOW Generation activities, or to subscribe to the NOW Gen e-newsletter (and receive updates and invitations to upcoming events, including regional gatherings held throughout the off-season), please contact Megan Sorenson, staff liaison, at msorenson@ciweb.org / 716-357-6243.
"In terms of Chautauqua’s programming, we continue to be amazed at how the Institution manages to go pretty deep on any given topic. The pace of change in our society and how we get news has been accelerating at such a rapid rate, but in that acceleration it seems the conversations around the big issues of our time tend to be pretty superficial. Not at Chautauqua.”

—Bill James

Volunteering for the Promise: BILL JAMES

Bill is the executive vice president of Global Accounts for IRI (Information Resources Inc), living in New York and London. He has spent his entire career in the consumer packaged goods industry, beginning his career at Procter and Gamble. Bill and Angela have been married for 25 years and have three children, Kate, Alice and Reid, who spent their summers growing up at Chautauqua. In addition to sitting on the Chautauqua Foundation Board, Bill and Angela sit on the Parent’s Advisory Council at Wake Forest University and the Advisory Committee of the Woodberry Forest School. In July, Bill sat down with Pillars to talk about his work as a Promise Campaign volunteer.

Before we were married, my wife and I were both working at Proctor and Gamble, and some friends told us we had to visit Chautauqua. Angela is from Cleveland, and she had never even heard of Chautauqua, but we came here after our wedding and found it to be a great place to spend the summer. Finally, 10 years ago, when we were living in Washington, D.C., we bought and remodeled our house on Wiley and put in a basement. We entertain here a lot and have been steady volunteers for the Chautauqua Foundation since we became property owners. I guess you’d say we’ve made the natural progression from helping with the Chautauqua Fund to working on the last capital campaign to serving on the Foundation Board. And now, I am working as a team captain along with Lydia Stroh and Jim Brady on the Promise Campaign cabinet. Our charge is to support each team of two volunteers who are assigned to go out and visit with 12 to 15 families and familiarize them with the goals of the campaign. Listening well is really what you learn to do in this process. We want to hear how to involve major donors and how to improve the Chautauqua experience. One thing you learn pretty quickly is that Chautauqua means very different things to different people. Angela and I have always been generalists in our own giving. We have confidence in the administration to use the money the way they think is best. We trust the Board, and are firm believers that you trust the staff to do their jobs.

In terms of Chautauqua’s programming, we continue to be amazed at how the Institution manages to go pretty deep on any given topic. The pace of change in our society and how we get news has been accelerating at such a rapid rate, but in that acceleration it seems the conversations around the big issues of our time tend to be pretty superficial. Not at Chautauqua. How the staff manages this is amazing. For example, we had our theme week on “The Ethics of Privacy” before the Edward Snowden story broke. At the same time we couldn’t have done that theme two years after 9/11. Their timing is outstanding, and the topics are not just flash-in-the-pan issues. From an arts standpoint, having all the disciplines here in the summer has always provided an amazing mix, but last summer The Romeo & Juliet Project took it to another level. That type of creativity and risk taking says a lot for our artistic staff.

Tom Brokaw was joking in Week One this year about how, to New Yorkers, Chautauqua is actually an old Indian term for “you can’t get there from here,” and it does take a lot to come to Chautauqua, but Chautauqua is worth the investment. It requires us all to make an investment, and Angela and I believe we make a statement when we support the heads of our artistic programs and provide scholarships for the students who come here. Our roots as an Institution are very deep. Infrastructure and resources are so important in keeping that depth. Ultimately, no matter where you land on any topic, I think we all agree that Chautauqua is a special place.
This spring and summer a cacophony of voices in the press wondered aloud about the future of opera as an art form. Heading into its 50th season, the board of the San Diego Opera voted to shut down. It was the artistic director publicly questioned whether opera in that city could be sustainable going forward. The blowback from the board’s decision resulted in a windfall of donations to the San Diego Opera, several board and staff resignations, and a subsequent vote to resume operations with a reduced budget.

In June, the general manager of New York’s Metropolitan Opera gave notice that in his opinion opera was dying along with its audience. He threatened bankruptcy, blaming the cost of labor for the board and staff resignations, and the blowback from the board’s decision resulted in a windfall of donations to the San Diego Opera, several board and staff resignations, and a subsequent vote to resume operations with a reduced budget.

Meanwhile, Alex Beard, chief executive at the Royal Opera in London, told the Guardian newspaper that, from his vantage point, “Opera is on a roll. As long as love, death, longing, and despair are part of the life experience, and people want to hear great stories told through music, opera has a vibrant future.”

In his column, Los Angeles Times critic Mark Swed agreed: “Opera has never had a wider or more anarchic reach,” he wrote in June. “You can’t escape it. Opera is broadcast in cinemas and at Times Square in New York. Opera pops up on the streets, in parks and at clubs, Museums mount operas, often with the intention of reinvention. There have been opera performances of late in grocery stores and banks as well as at a wax museum in New York and Union Station in Los Angeles.”

While this debate raged on, Chautauqua Opera, the oldest continuously producing summer opera company in the country, launched its 2014 season and simultaneously celebrated the 20th anniversary of Jay Lesenger’s leadership of the company. Marking the milestone, Chautauqua Opera’s chief cheerleader and dynamic benefactor Jane A. Gross sat down with Pillars to discuss the state of opera at Chautauqua and her ongoing delight to be a part of it.

“Jay is a true educator with an extremely generous spirit,” Gross said. “He wants to work with anyone who wants to improve, anyone who wants to be a part of the industry. Other department heads are similarly committed to their students. We are so fortunate to have these individuals here. In fact, if Chautauqua didn’t have its schools of art, it would be a perfectly ordinary resort.”

For Gross, who calls it as she sees it, being an opera supporter is a happy passion and pre-occupation. Chautauqua Opera in particular, is inspiring. Her special love for the young artists is an integral part of her life in New York City and in Chautauqua. She has been generous and caring in sustaining and assisting the company and the young artists in all facets of their lives. Jane is one who believes in ‘paying it forward.’ She is about their future and our role in shaping that future.

The physical manifestation of Gross’ passion for opera is the renovation of the old Chautauqua Central High School property, now known as the Jane A. Gross Opera Center. Dedicated in 2005, the “JAG,” as it is called, incorporates what was once a high school gym, now transformed into a rehearsal space large enough to accommodate the entire company. This newly air-conditioned space, together with the office building Gross similarly outfitted across the lane, provides the company with six dedicated vocal coaching studios, a library, a costume and wig shop, and comfortable offices. Gross was involved all along the way in the renovation process, encouraging the staff to try out various options on how best to arrange their accommodations.

“I have seen back-office facilities in other summer programs, and we can now match up to anyone,” Gross said proudly. “With the Connolly family’s renovation of the opera dorm, we are set. We just need to redo Norton.”

Norton Hall, an Art Deco structure built from board-formed concrete in 1929, was originally created to house Chautauqua’s theater and opera companies and was given to the Institution by Mrs. Oliver Norton as a memorial to her husband and daughter. The house opened in July of the ominous year of 1929, and during its initial week of operation, many luminaries attended performed appearances, including New York Governor Franklin D Roosevelt, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Edison, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Ford, Mr. and Mrs. Harvey Firestone, Mr. and Mrs. Adolph Ochs and Amelia Earhart.

Without air conditioning and with severe limitations in its capacity to handle contemporary technology and larger, movable sets, Norton now presents a special challenge to the Institution. Renovations have been discussed perennially, but the costs may outweight the benefits. While budgetary restrictions have reduced the total number of operas mounted each season, Lesenger has been able to move one production to the Amphitheater, which has proved to be a boon to the program and its audience.

When Norma was produced in 2010, the Athenaeum Hotel was filled to capacity with guests, and more than 3,000 people were in the audience to see Barbara Quintiliani perform the title role without amplification. In addition, some 400 seats for the performance were sold as extra tickets, not as part of a gate pass. To add to Chautauqua’s distinction, Lesenger has also staged a number of operas that are not readily available in other venues around the country.

“Presenting opera in the Amp is fabulous,” Gross said. “Having opera included as an offering in a space you’re accustomed to going to encourages people to try it. Madam Butterfly was a huge success. Children came and stayed awake and were paying attention. Giving new audiences their first exposure to opera is as important as anything we do.”

Gross came to opera later in life. Growing up in Manhattan, she had been a regular at musical theater and was a devoted fan of Rodgers and Hammerstein. She later subscribed to the ballet for a few years. “But the best part of the ballet to me was the music,” she confessed, which led her, in turn, to the symphony. Finally, in the mid-1980s a friend gave Gross tickets to see Turandot at the Met for her birthday, and she was hooked. That occasion also happened to be during the period that Gross first began coming to Chautauqua.

She admits that she especially loves the creative people of so many
A number of generous Chautauquans have enthusiastically underwritten the new Inter-arts Collaboration Initiative which brings together all of the Institution’s artistic departments to present an original production in the Amphitheater for one night. CTC Associate Artistic Director Andrew Borba directed this year’s phenomenal Go West!, which featured the creative use of historic films, photographs and paintings projected on canvas “sails” behind the Amp stage.

Vice President and Director of Programming Marty Merkley will direct the 2015 production of Carmina Burana — 24 poems from the Middle Ages that were set to music by Carl Orff in 1936. Though a production of Orff’s best known work has been staged in the Amp before, Merkley recently confessed that he, too, is considering the use of innovative visuals to set the stage for the songs that range from bawdy to celebratory to mystical.

By popular demand this third inter-arts collaboration will be presented twice during the 2015 season. If you’d like to join this distinguished group of donors in support of Carmina Burana, please contact Geof Follansbee at the Chautauqua Foundation 716-357-6220.

different talents and skill sets who come together to make opera. As a member of the Opera Guild, Gross has served as an opera “parent” to students — taking them to lunch, helping with laundry, bringing flowers to performances. And like a number of other Chautauquans, Gross will travel great distances in the off-season to see the young artists she has hosted when they perform across the country.

In addition, “Chez Jane” is a bright room and bath in her New York apartment overlooking the East River that she makes available to young opera talents when they are in New York City for an audition or performance. One of her recent Chautauqua favorites, Renée Rapier, a mezzo soprano and Adler Fellow at the San Francisco Opera last year, just moved full-blown into her career. Gross introduced Rapier to her new agent.

Now Gross is on the Board of Overseers for Opera America, a national service organization for the art form, which has also created the National Opera Center in Manhattan, offering a recital hall, rehearsal center, studios, library and business center, and a much-needed audition site for artists.

“Jay Lesenger introduced me to Marc Scorca, the CEO of Opera America,” she explained, “and now we have named a rehearsal space in that facility.” Gross also attended the Opera America conference in San Francisco this year, which was dedicated to the topic of reimagining opera audiences and their needs. “We talked about new works, smaller works, smaller venues — all the ways opera can be presented,” Gross said.

Of her immersion in all things opera, Gross chalks it up to the satisfaction of adopting a project and sticking with it. “There’s an enormous amount of gratification in that,” she says. And if Gross has anything to do with it, opera will continue to thrive at Chautauqua and elsewhere in this country.

“Presenting opera in the Amp is fabulous. Having opera included as an offering in a space you’re accustomed to going to encourages people to try it. Madam Butterfly was a huge success. Children came and stayed awake and were paying attention. Giving new audiences their first exposure to opera is as important as anything we do.” — Jane A. Gross

2013 Supporters: The Romeo & Juliet Project Carolyn and Bill Byham Wendy and Edward Cohen Cindy and Francis Letro Jerome M. Kobacker Fund Cathy Bonner Holly and Peter Sullivan

2014 Supporters: Go West! Carolyn and Bill Byham Wendy and Edward Cohen Cindy and Francis Letro Jerome M. Kobacker Fund Sidney and Anita Holec

2015 Supporters: Cammina Burana Carolyn and Bill Byham Anita Lin and Michael Morley
Two years ago, Dick Wade had never set foot on the Institution grounds when his wife called from Chautauqua and said she’d found a place she wanted to buy. He boarded a plane in Michigan, but by the time he arrived to the grounds, the house had been sold to another buyer.

“Last year we came for the second week of the season and looked again,” Dick explains, “and while we were considering our options, I asked Debby what she would do if something happened to me. She said without missing a beat that she would move to Chautauqua. I said, well, if that’s really where your heart is, I’m in.”

He’s a retired banker. She’s a retired special education teacher who spent the latter part of her career teaching at the college level. These days they spend their winters in Arizona and have put their primary residence in Michigan on the market after finding a place along the brick walk on Vincent. Their new condo is already lovingly decorated thanks to Debby and Lakewood Furniture, and by Week Four of the 2014 season, the Wades were in a Chautauqua groove.

“We haven’t gotten out on the lake yet,” Dick confesses. “But some days we’ve been to as many as five different things and don’t get home until 10:30 at night.”

Not that there’s any rush, but Dick, after 37 years as a banker, is exuberant about the menu of things he says he missed for years. “What’s here are all the things I let go for my job, and now Chautauqua is rounding me out.”

“We love the lectures,” Debby adds. “It would take an act of God for us not to get to the Amp, and about four out of every five days we’ve been to hear the afternoon speakers at the Hall of Philosophy.”

Debby knew what Dick was missing and brought him up to speed quickly. She’s been meeting her sister at Chautauqua for the last 15 years for a week at a time, at first staying in the Athenaeum and then renting at various spots on the grounds — the usual Chautauqua story. And perhaps the way the Wades found their condo was to be expected, too, but they are still giddy about that process.

“Last year we ended up renting the place across the hall from this condo,” Debby explains.

Dick picks up the story: “I was telling the people who lived here how we were going to see a house that we were very interested in, but that another couple was also interested, and we would only have a hour to look at that place and make an offer. The folks here then asked if we’d be interested in seeing their condo since it was going on the market.” He smiles. “Debby came right over in her P.J.s and decided she wanted it within 10 minutes. The owners told us we could have it if we’d just be patient; there were a few contingencies. We did it on a handshake and closed this June 15th, right before the season started.”

The new Chautauquans brought their two cats, Maggie and Henry, and they haven’t looked back. “You sit next to somebody in the Amp and all of a sudden you know them,” Debby says.

“We met a gentleman who’s been here 74 years in a row,” Dick adds. “We feel at home already. The attention to civil discourse is very true.”

Debby’s sister has already visited twice from Rochester, and the Wades say they plan to stay on the grounds through the end of September before returning to Arizona. Their rituals include walking the grounds every morning. They also joined the Bestor Society immediately. “It’s a very nice way to get some special opportunities,” Dick says. “The Foundation has been very welcoming. We’ve been to the President’s Cottage, and Debby has been to the Women’s Club.”

“We can’t cram much more in.” Debby laughs. “We’ve been to Bemus Point, to Webb’s for dinner. Twice to the Heirloom Restaurant in the hotel — very good. We’ve been to the Presbyterian House for coffee and the Lutheran House for punch and cookies.”

The Wades’ favorite experience, however, was witnessing the historic Ebenezer Baptist Choir perform the last Sunday in June. “Four thousand people on their feet singing Gospel music was amazing,” says Dick. They attended Pastor Raphael Warnock’s services in the Amp for the next four days running.

“But then there was also the week on ‘Feeding a Hungry Planet’ featuring speakers from National Geographic. I don’t know how you could spend five or six days better,” says Dick, “getting facts from people who know what they’re talking about. One guy was all about organic and the woman the next day was all about GMO.”

Clearly Chautauqua has some new boosters. The Wades are not wading in; they have taken the full plunge.
Volunteering for the Promise:
KATHY CLINGAN

Promise Campaign volunteer Kathy Clingan and her husband Tom live just outside New York City in Chatham, N.J. Kathy served on the Chautauqua Board of Trustees from 2003 to 2011 and is the founder and owner of Take a Bough LLC, a small retail business that conducts boutique sales as fundraisers for hospitals, schools, arts organizations and disease support groups. Kathy recently sat down on her front porch to talk with us about her work as a Promise Campaign volunteer.

I've been coming to Chautauqua, on and off, since I was about 3 years old. My mother was a scholarship student in the 1940s and sang in the opera chorus when Juilliard ran the opera program here. She was fortunate enough to receive an invitation to study at Juilliard after college, and although she was not Renee Fleming, she did solo work in New York and continued performing later in her life after moving back to Ohio. She died in June of 2014.

Tom and his family have been long-time Chautauquans. We found a postcard that his grandmother had sent from Chautauqua in 1906. Tom caught a muskie when he was about 15 years old; the photo of him with his prize catch hangs in the living room.

I had a summer job as a swimming instructor at the Chautauqua Boys' and Girls' Club before I went to college. Our family didn't have a house here, so I lived with several other girl counselors above the Girls' Club. We had four beds per room and a little kitchen up there. It was wild: at nights bats would fly through the open windows! Winnie Llewellyn and her husband were the directors of Boys' and Girls' Club then, and Mrs. Llewellyn would patrol at night, hiding behind the bushes to make sure we all stayed out of mischief.

When our children were toddlers, we looked for a place to rent. Staying the entire season was not in our plans at that point, but in the early ‘80s it was considered very strange to rent for “just a week” as opposed to a season or half-season. We found various weekly rentals around the grounds, and gradually increased the time we spent here. Some of the places were really old, and one winter the landlord called to tell us that the house we were going to rent had fallen down! We finally found our house on Foster, and we've been here ever since.

I first got involved with the Chautauqua Fund because I had good experiences helping to raise funds for the wonderful independent school in New Jersey that our daughter attended. Initially I hesitated at the idea of asking people for money — that reluctance is common, I guess. I'd never done it, but I started calling fellow parents and alumnae on behalf of the school. Some were nice. Some were not pleasant at all, but I just kept at it.

Then I started volunteering for other schools and colleges. Making these calls is sometimes a cue for people to tell you everything they think is wrong. However, feedback is valuable information for any organization. I once carried a concern of a fellow parent back to the school administration and some changes were made. She and I became friends and stayed in touch for years after our children graduated.

So naturally I said yes when I was asked to work on The Promise Campaign. I believe the endowment of key staff positions will represent a huge leap forward for Chautauqua. That kind of enduring financial support will not only add further significance to these positions, but will also be a real tribute to our present directors and help assure that we can find such talent and personal integrity in future directors.

We love being a part of so many aspects of Chautauqua. The symphony is the heart and soul, but the “mix” is really important. We are enthusiastic audience members at the opera (and great fans of Jay Lesenger), the theater (and great fans of Vivienne Benesch), the ballet (and great fans of Jean-Pierre Bonnefoix and Patricia McBride) and the MSFO (and great fans of Timothy Muffitt). The morning lectures and the 2 p.m. religion lectures are both centerpiece of my day. The presence of all of these elements enriches each individual element.

This summer, we “adopted” a music school student through the Connections program, a trombonist from Texas whose personality, musicality and enthusiasm have enriched our experience in a whole new way. The opportunity for connections like this also adds to the mix for us.

I was a Trustee when the current strategic plan that became the basis for The Promise Campaign was being developed. I was in the arts and education study group, a thorough process that drew ideas from performers, teachers, staff and community members. So it was a natural thing for me to follow through on that work, and I wanted to stay involved after I rotated off the board.

We have two children — a son, John, who lives in London and works in finance, and a daughter, Julie, who works in the advertising business in New York. They both went to Children's School and Club and worked at various jobs here from being a Club counselor to scooping ice cream to waiting tables during the summers. Our daughter has kept more of a connection here, since she lives closer.

We try to engage with people who are here for the first time, encouraging them to come to neighborhood picnics and welcoming them into the community. We can all play a role in supporting, promoting and sustaining Chautauqua.
Three Jamestown foundations have recently pledged their support for the Amphitheater reconstruction project in recognition of the building’s central role as the only venue of its kind in Chautauqua County and the region at large.

“When we were approached to support the improvements to the Amp,” said Tom Flowers, president of the Hultquist Foundation, “we were immediately interested. The Amp is such an integral part of Chautauqua, and we were pleased to see how the proposed renovations manage to improve the functionality of the facility without losing what makes it Chautauqua. No matter how hard you try, what people in this day and age expect of a performance space is different from what it was a hundred years ago,” he said.

The Hultquist Foundation has pledged $1.5 million to be paid over five years in support of the project. “We all recognize that the Chautauqua Institution has been around for a long time and has met the test of time. The programs and speakers that Chautauqua brings to our area are unique,” Flowers added.

Though the present trustees of the Hultquist Foundation no longer include any Hultquist family members, all are residents of the greater Jamestown area and are committed to supporting local charities, primarily in human services and higher education. The foundation was established in 1965 by Besse Hultquist Hall and Carl Hultquist, in memory of their sibling Earl Hultquist. Earl and his brother Carl were local industrialists primarily involved in furniture making. The foundation supported the renovation of the Hultquist Center in an earlier capital campaign and has made an annual grant to Chautauqua’s Music School Festival Orchestra for more than 20 years.

Another community-minded Jamestown family, the Sheldons, established their foundation in 1948. The family had accumulated resources from the creation and sale of a photographic paper in the late 19th century to George Eastman of Rochester. When Ralph Sheldon sold his stock in the company that would come to be known as Eastman Kodak, he bought the local Jamestown newspaper and worked diligently to build up the local community. Today the Ralph C. Sheldon Foundation invests in some 100 nonprofits in Jamestown and the southern part of Chautauqua County, particularly on behalf of area youth through such organizations as the public libraries, YMCA, YWCA, 4-H, the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, WCA Hospital, JCC, various camps around the lake, and major cultural organizations, including Chautauqua.

“The Sheldon Foundation gave its first gift to Chautauqua back in 1988 and has continued to contribute to the Institution’s annual fund as well as every major capital campaign since then,” explained executive director Linda Swanson. “We were the primary donor for the education building on the grounds named for the Sheldons, and now we have just committed $150,000 for three years toward the Amphitheater project. Along with Chautauqua, the Sheldon Foundation is also investing heavily toward renewing the health of Chautauqua Lake, she added. According to Robert Ostrom, president of the Winifred Crawford Dibert Foundation, nonprofits that benefit local youth are also a priority of Jamestown’s Dibert Foundation. “And Mrs. Dibert believed very strongly in the mission of Chautauqua even before the Foundation was established,” Ostrom said. As a result, Dibert has been a longtime supporter of the band camp held on the grounds during Week Eight. “We usually have a board meeting at Chautauqua that week and are able to have these young musicians perform for us, which is so gratifying.” Nearly 100 students enroll in this regional band camp for grades 9 to 12, and some 70 percent are from Chautauqua County. In 2009, Dibert also funded professional development workshops for early childhood educators offered on the grounds in association with visiting experts from Sesame Street.

Ostrom noted that members of the Dibert board often take in a lecture in the Amp while they are on the grounds each season. “So contributing to the restoration of Chautauqua’s Amphitheater is a no-brainer,” he said. “So much of the Chautauqua experience takes place there. Very few rural areas have such a cultural center.” The Dibert Foundation has made a commitment of $100,000 toward the Amphitheater project.

“We are grateful for the ongoing support and confidence of our philanthropic neighbors,” said Foundation CEO Geof Follansbee. “It is important that we partner with these foundations on multiple projects that touch our local community. Their endorsement and belief in the promise of Chautauquans as embodied in the Amp project is critical to us all.”
Following a gala kick-off dinner in the Amphitheater, four families build momentum for the Amphitheater project. Milton and Tamar Maltz, Jesse and Cathy Marion, Roger and Jane Goodell, and John and Cathy Milos made their generous pledges this season in support of the largest single construction project in the Institution’s history. With a total goal of $33.5 million — which includes an endowment to maintain the building over time — the Amphitheater project represents roughly a third of the $98.2 million Chautauqua is seeking during The Promise Campaign, which will conclude in 2016.

All four families who recently committed to the project have strong ties to Chautauqua. Milton and Tamar Maltz helped to create and develop the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum in Cleveland, the Maltz Jupiter Theater in Florida, and the Lieber Institute for Brain Development in Baltimore. They also facilitated the partnership between the Institution and the International Spy Museum of Washington, D.C., another of their well-known philanthropic projects. The couple has regularly enjoyed Chautauqua’s programming following their retirement from the business world.

Cathy Marion, a native of Chautauqua County, went to Falconer Central School and graduated from SUNY Fredonia where she serves on the board of the College Foundation. Her husband Jesse is the founder of Millennium Seismic Ltd., a seismic data library headquartered in Calgary, Alberta. Though they make their home in Houston, Texas, and are supporters of a number of charities there, the Marion family has also made gifts to a number of arts and educational institutions in western New York through their family foundation.

Roger Goodell is a member of a long-time Chautauqua family, many of whom still live in the Jamestown area. Goodell’s father, Senator Charles Goodell, a leading political figure in New York State, was appointed to fill the Senate seat of Robert F. Kennedy when he was assassinated. Though Roger and Jane live outside New York City, where Jane worked in broadcasting and where Roger still commutes to New York City, the Goodells have made gifts to carry out his duties as commissioner of the National Football League, Chautauqua is the place where all the Goodells gather for family reunions and relaxation.

Donors John and Cathy Milos discovered Chautauqua when they were living in Buffalo in the 1980s and have continued their regular pilgrimage to the grounds — summer and winter — since that time. The Miloses launched and eventually sold a successful catalog business headquartered in Cleveland. At Chautauqua, Cathy serves on the board of the Athenaeum Hotel. John has been a member of the Chautauqua Board of Trustees since 2011.

“The Amphitheater is the center of our community — it has served us well for more than 100 years,” John said. “We wanted to be part of making sure it would serve the community for another 100 years.”

On June 19, 2014, members of the Chautauqua Foundation Board of Directors, the Chautauqua Institution Board of Trustees, donors and special guests joined together in the Amphitheater for a unique dinner to celebrate the Promise of Chautauqua and kick off the 2014 season.

“In early September, two prominent Chautauquans made national headlines: Patricia McBride, resident faculty member in the Chautauqua School of Dance and associate artistic director of the Charlotte Ballet, is among the elite group of artists who will be celebrated at the Kennedy Center Honors in Washington, D.C., an annual ceremony to be broadcast nationally. McBride will take her place with four other honorees — actor Tom Hanks, comedienne Mariska Hargitay, and Psycho composer John Williams — as the five are feted by peers and seated in the Kennedy Center balcony alongside President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama.

McBride, who stages a George Balanchine work every summer on the Chautauqua grounds, was a student in Balanchine’s school at 14 and joined the New York City Ballet two years later. She became a soloist at age 17 and a principal dancer the next year. During her illustrious career she performed around the world as prima ballerina, partnering with such luminaries as Edward Villella, Mikhail Baryshnikov and her husband, Jean-Pierre Bonnefoux.

McBride retired from the New York City Ballet in 1989 and is fondly remembered by audiences for the ballets that were created expressly for her by Balanchine and Jerome Robbins. Longtime Chautauqua Megan Smith was tapped by President Obama on the same day as the Kennedy Honors announcements to serve as chief technology officer of the United States. She is the first woman to hold the position. Smith, a Buffalo native and City Honors School graduate, studied at MIT and went on to serve as CEO of Planets Out Inc. and then moved to Google where she worked as vice president of business development for nine years and general manager of Google.org, the nonprofit arm of the tech giant. Most recently Smith was serving as vice president of Google[x], the division that has been responsible for the development of Google Glass and the self-driving car. Smith is the daughter of Joan Aspell Smith, who served for many years as director of the Chautauqua Children’s School. Smith was featured in the cover story of Pillars in Spring 2013 and delivered an Amp lecture that season.

An initial $10,000 gift by Marcia Steele has launched the Mary Whitaker Memorial Fund, an endowment to be used for support of the Chautauqua Symphony Orchestra. The donor invites the participation of others to add to the fund with a minimum goal of $25,000 to be secured in honor of Whitaker, a violinist and 35-year veteran of the CSO. Tragically, Whitaker was the victim of a robbery and murder at her summer home near Sherman on the August morning following the CSO’s final concert of the season.

“The news of this loss was devastating to the symphony and, indeed, to the entire Chautauqua family,” said Vice President and Director of Programming Marty Merkley. “None of us can forget Mary’s energetic spirit and her dedication to her craft, both at Chautauqua and with the Westchester Philharmonic Orchestra and her other work with various New York City orchestras on Broadway.” Merkley and Associate
The Comforts of Home: HAGEN-WENSLEY FULFILLS THE PROMISE

The Promise Campaign had hardly begun when Susie Hagen of Erie, Pennsylvania, made a major gift to support a total makeover of the historic Wensley House, the residence beside the lake where the Institution’s distinguished speakers and performers have stayed since 1966. Built in 1891 and gifted to Chautauqua by Nina Wensley, today’s Hagen-Wensley House retains the flavor and elegance of the original property, but the accommodations have been modernized to satisfy contemporary expectations. The bathrooms are spacious and outfitted with plush towels and fixtures that reflect the era of the house. An elevator is a welcome addition for the transport of luggage and those guests needing assistance with the three flights of stairs. Three large porches, one per floor, continue to be the place for engaging conversations and the launch of new friendships. The modernized kitchen makes it possible for staff to offer an array of beverages and snacks and to meet any special dietary needs of guests and their children.

“The kitchen, as in most homes, has also become another gathering area, especially when it’s raining,” said Hagen-Wensley hostess Rachel Borzilleri. She remembers heading into the kitchen during Week One this season only to find Tom Brokaw making coffee for everyone. “The house creates opportunities for people to quickly bond with each other and Chautauqua,” she adds. “This kind of interaction is just what we hoped for,” says Vice President and Emily and Richard Smucker Chair for Education Sherri Babcock. “It gives our guests a chance to experience what it’s like to be in residence at Chautauqua with their families, to connect with other speakers and performers, and to entice them to return.”

Since the renovation, Roger Rosenblat has brought his coterie of writers to stay at Hagen-Wensley, which provides a place for the literary conversations that start in the evening on the porch. When National Geographic magazine’s executive environmental editor, Dennis Dimick assembled a group of explorers for the 2012 program week on “Water Matters,” not all of the presenters had met. In their down time at Hagen-Wensley the group began talking about the common objective of feeding the planet, which led to the Week Two program this season on that topic.

In 2009, when photographer Annie Griffiths and documentary filmmaker Mick Davie met on the Hagen-Wensley porch and began discussing the parallels in their work, they came up with the idea of creating a free, worldwide archive of films and photographs of and about women. From this inspiration Griffiths began assembling a team of journalists to work on Ripple Effect Images, a new charitable organization with the mission of “documenting the plight of poor women and girls around the world, and highlighting the programs that are helping to empower them, especially as they deal with the devastating effects of climate change.” Griffiths returned to Chautauqua this past season for Week Eight to speak on her view of the global issues that rarely receive serious attention from American media, politicians and audiences.

“Erroll Davis, the superintendent of the Atlanta school system, loved the experience of the house and has come back every season since he was here,” says Babcock. “And I think it is fair to say that Hagen-Wensley had a positive influence on filmmaker Ken Burns.” Burns and his family were in residence at Hagen-Wensley this past season as he filled the Amp for a week of lectures on his work.

Longtime collaborator Colin Campbell, the retiring CEO of Colonial Williamsburg, remembers “It might have been a temptation to add a few more bedrooms and reduce the number of porches,” she says, “but the Institution made the right decision to keep the outdoor space for conversations.”

The guest list continues to grow and Borzilleri — who has hosted two Supreme Court justices, many musical legends including Julie Andrews and Paul Simon, and Chautauqua favorite Alexander Gavrylyuk — continues adding to the shelves of books in the library written by guests.

“Susie Hagen has been with me all the way,” Borzilleri says. “She wants everything to be just right, and I think we’re getting there. People appreciate the chance to relax and experience Chautauqua in a house that offers the comforts of home.”