The Next Greatest Generation:
TAKING CHAUTAUQUA GLOBAL

Chautauqua’s current strategic plan recognizes that the leadership of the Institution will undergo significant transition in the coming decade, as many longtime administrative and volunteer leaders reach retirement age. The next generation will be called upon to steward the Institution through these transitions and to serve as board members, advisors, donors and volunteers.

As the trustees hold ongoing strategic discussions around how the Institution can continue broadening its impact and connecting with younger families, Pillars interviewed three young Chautauquans who are leaders in their fields and asked them to reflect on where the world is headed and how Chautauqua can adapt. Not surprisingly, technology emerged as a central theme.

When Megan Smith tries to explain Chautauqua to her techie colleagues at Google headquarters in Mountain View, Calif., she tells them “It’s as if the TED Conference [a wildly popular Internet-based lecture series] had been founded in the 1870s by Thomas Edison’s talented father-in-law and a visionary Methodist minister. Of course, they didn’t have the Internet back then, but they did build a community with Ideas Worth Sharing and Conversations Worth Having,” she says, echoing the slogans that entice Google for Nonprofits. Originally from Buffalo and a graduate of MIT, Smith is vice president for Google’s [now Google Earth], Where2Tech (Google Maps) and Picasa. She also led a transition of the company’s philanthropic arm known as Google.org as it began to add and expand engineering-based projects such as Google Crisis Response and Google for Nonprofits. Originally from Buffalo and a graduate of MIT, Smith is married to All Things Digital co-creator and co-executive editor and technology columnist Kara Swisher. They have two sons, Louie and Alex, who are Children’s School graduates, now in groups 3 and 6 at Boys’ and Girls’ Club.

Smith arranged for her colleagues in the Google Earth and Maps teams to bring a fleet of unusual vehicles equipped with cameras (pictured above) to the grounds last summer to collect 360-degree Google Street View images at the pedestrian-bicycle level. They also shot images inside a number of key historic and iconic Chautauqua buildings. The image collection will go live on Google this spring.

Smith thinks and talks fast. On her morning commute to work, she eagerly describes the impact of the Internet as it has enhanced what she calls adjacency. “Things that were never adjacent to each other before have now come together in the digital world. The most exciting thing to me is this inter-wiring of all of us into one big network. Data sets are now adjacent. People’s wildly divergent points of view have become adjacent and available to each other. People who could never before know what others across a country or across the world are thinking or experiencing are now connecting instantaneously.”

Smith cites the Arab Spring as a prime example of the way in which new political movements can accelerate using digital means. Smith admits that the concept of adjacency is not new. The movements to abolish slavery and realize women’s suffrage were deeply embedded along the Erie Canal, which networked ideas that spread with commerce up and down the water channel. Now the channels are digital.

“Of course, at Chautauqua, we have always created adjacency for the people who are here. That is Chautauqua’s great appeal—the opportunity to be in a place where art, music, drama, dance, different faiths and big ideas can mix with each other. But now the Internet does the same thing. What this means for Chautauqua is that anyone and everyone can be Chautauquans without ever coming to the grounds,” she says. “Of course, not in the exact same way as those here each summer, but in a new way, perhaps more like the vision of the CLSC and the traveling Chautauqans, where some people can come in person each summer, others come a few times, some may never be able to make the trek, but they could still be Chautauquans.”

Kyle Keogh, also at Google, has a dream that Chautauqua will create more and more discourse outside the grounds, extending the dialogue by digital means. He says he’s pleased to see that the Institution has begun to leverage technology more, posting materials online and engaging people digitally after the lectures and performances are over. He would like to see more recordings of student recitals and performances in the offerings posted online.

Keogh is industry director for U.S. telecom media sales at Google. Prior to this position, he led Google’s North American sales strategy and operations, having joined the company after stints at IBM, Talk America, J.P. Morgan, and McKinsey.

see COVER STORY Page 2

IN THIS ISSUE:

Major Gifts
Endowment for the departments of Religion and Education Page 5

Backstage
Broadening CHQ’s literary programming Page 6

Major Gifts
Preserving Chautauqua’s trees Page 10

Chautauquans
Dan and Linda Silverberg Page 11

Apple is published by the Chautauqua Foundation, Inc., Chautauqua, New York. Editor, Jodi Fields; Design, Raymond Downey; Photos, Donna Campbell unless otherwise listed. Tag Photo, Michelle Konieczny, The Chautauqua Daily
Cover Story continued

Originally from Pittsford, N.Y., he studied at Hamilton College, the London School of Economics, and earned an MBA from the Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth College. He is married to Elizabeth Fox Keogh, who is originally from Buffalo. They have three children.

Both Keogh and Smith subscribe to the Silicon Valley mantra of “launch and iterate,” meaning “jump right in, try something new, put the prototype out there, and see what people like and don’t like,” says Keogh. As the price of digital technology continues to drop, the possibilities for new audience development and extending the reach of Chautauqua become greater.

Smith suggests that teen and 20-something Chautauquans, if set loose, would be the best to lead the Institution toward the best and least expensive ways to expand the reach and impact of the Institution overall. She recognizes that such an idea might seem inverted or be hard to swallow for some people her age and older, “but for our digital-native youth” as she calls them, “AOL was already big before they were born. They don’t know a world without these connections. Digital kids are aggregating and sharing all kinds of ideas and information.”

Smith theorizes that youth are differently connected across generations than in the past. By contrast, baby boomers had to effect important change primarily through protesting against the system and their elders, and did not have the access to organizations and tools to lead from within systems to adapt to critical changes that were needed.

Today, the millennials and digital natives, who are boomers’ children and grandchildren, have a broader set of tools and access to connect across generations and engage, and to start movements, new companies and organizations.

“So many are becoming social entrepreneurs instead of protesters,” Smith says, “and the phenomenon is global.” She cites the example of six Afghan entrepreneurial teams in Heart, 80 miles from here, with Ira, who have founded tech start-ups with social impact, with help from U Heart, IBM, Google and the Department of Defense.

“These are IT specialists in their early 20s who are going to change their country,” she says. “The more we are creating opportunities for talented youth and entrepreneurs of all ages to innovate and communicate information, the more positive change we’ll see. Great ideas can move into the mainstream much faster today. The core of who is included at the table is changing significantly. It’s become a much bigger, more interesting collaborative table.”

Ben Sorensen, originally from Rochester, N.Y., is the associate pastor for children, youth and families at First Presbyterian Church of Fort Lauderdale, Florida. He is also an intelligence officer in the U.S. Naval Reserve, attached to the Southern Command in Miami. He’s been active in the Big Brothers/Big Sisters organization and Youth Leadership Broward. Sorensen studied Spanish and international studies at Emory University, earned a law degree from Georgetown University and his master’s and doctor of divinity degrees from Amridge University in Montgomery, Alabama. He was recently married to Anna Fornias.

Now 35, Sorensen attributes his already wide range of professional experiences in part to Chautauqua. He remembers an Amp lecture he heard as a child that featured a speaker who was both a preacher and a lawyer. “I didn’t know that was possible until I heard this man,” Sorensen says.

He also firmly believes in the possibility of greater global engagement for Chautauqua. “How can we challenge each other to reach around the globe? And how can we more broadly exemplify and promote Chautauqua’s values worldwide?”

“I’ll never forget,” Sorensen says, “I was 10 years old in 1988 when the Soviet exchange program happened at Chautauqua. Some of the Russian guests of the Institution came to our house, and we had caviar. It was sort of a white-knuckle experience for me, because here were these people who had been portrayed as being so dangerous, right in our living room! But my parents seemed to like them and the caviar was cool.”

Today Sorensen envisions an exchange program for international youth that would bring them to Chautauqua for a week or two, in a design akin to the New Clergy Program. “For example, we could train kids from Rwanda in conflict resolution. Or have kids from South Korea and inner-city Baltimore come together for leadership training and stay with Chautauqua families. That surely would increase dialogue and visibility in and beyond the Institution.”

Sorensen loves the presence of the denominational houses on the grounds and suggests that there should also be an international house. “It would be so great for the Chautauqua brand if we hosted an international peace conference here,” he says.

Noting that he watches TED lectures on his iPhone when he’s working out, Sorensen wishes for a similar app on the iPhone that would allow him to listen to the Chautauqua lectures. “Wow, I wish I could have tapped into a live stream of the interfaith conference that the Religion Department hosted last June, too.”

Sorensen says that gender, racial, and religious inclusion have slowly improved at Chautauqua, but socioeconomic barriers are still an issue. “That won’t happen through marketing but will have to come through intentional efforts with adequate financial backing.” He has signed up to serve on an advisory board of younger Chautauquans who are being assembled to tackle some of these issues and report back to the board of trustees.

Sorensen is especially excited that Chris Hayes of MSNBC is on the lecture platform in Week Two this season. “We need to continue creating opportunities to see and hear young people like Chris on that stage—and clergy from around the world, and cutting-edge social entrepreneurs.”

Megan Smith believes that the intergenerational nature of Chautauqua means “we are all the next greatest generation! Together, we have the answers within us. Chautauqua has always been young people connected with older people. Our job now is to listen to the younger folks and invest in them. The more we are creating opportunities for talented youth to lead as we take the values of Chautauqua out there, the greater this community will be both in the global network and, interestingly, here where we gather each summer.”

A Firm Commitment to the Future

Chautauqua’s lecture platform in Week Two will explore the projects and perspectives of accomplished young adults, disciplined efforts of “the next greatest generation” in diverse fields. Wednesday’s presentation, the centerpiece of the week, will capture the collaborative characterist of this generation, as all the week’s participants join moderator Chris Hayes in a discussion of the issues facing the action required from this generation.

Speaking from his law office in Pittsburgh, Chautauqua Board of Trustees Chairman George Snyder also affirmed his commitment to developing additional formal and informal ways for younger Chautauquans to engage with the Institution. “I strongly encourage the NOW Generation to find ways to get involved in whatever interests them—through the friends groups that help support our individual programs and all the volunteer opportunities that weave Chautauquans together and make this Institution work.”

Working with Megan Sorenson in the Foundation Office, Snyder says he is eager to form an advisory council to the board of trustees to encourage more two-way conversations about the future of Chautauqua.

“How can we challenge each other to reach around the globe? And how can we more broadly exemplify and promote Chautauqua’s values worldwide?”

—Ben Sorensen
We begin to recognize their kids’ familiar faces, some people we have never formally met but nevertheless recognize. And going for a walk down to the lake, we remember things forgotten in the winter months—how the cottage on a particular corner always has those lilies blooming come July and how the sweet scent ambushes every passer-by, even before they round the corner and see the flowers.

We remember one more time how glad we are that our children and grandchildren can actually experience such a communal space, something that must be much more like what our grandparents knew when they were young. We talk about how our children are being shaped by all this close living in a safe space and what they are learning about neighborliness and responsibility for themselves and others.

And in the midst of it all, the Chautauqua Fund is enhancing this incredibly sensory summer experience, whether we contribute to it or not. It’s like public radio. We can experience it simply by tuning in. Sure, at Chautauqua, we all pay a significant sum for a gate ticket and accommodations, but all those little things—the resurfaced tennis courts, the fresh art supplies for the Children’s School, the surprise guest speakers at Boys’ and Girls’ Club, the manicured greens on the golf course, the sheet music for the choir, the contributions to those organizations and causes that they value back home. That’s one reason we often hear to explain their reluctance to invest further in Chautauqua. But we believe it is essential that all of us who share in this enterprise must contribute something if we are going to continue the improvements we’ve seen in recent years.

Today, only about a third of those individuals and families who spend more than a day here actually contribute on an annual basis. We all must become engaged in our ability to innovate in programming and to continue offering the assistance we need in recruiting the highest-quality students, performers, speakers, and other enhancements to this unparalleled experience, this shared space.
Lifting the Mystery: A NEW VISITORS CENTER FOR FIRST TIME GUESTS

The center will also feature media displays, artifacts and videos that tell the story of Chautauqua—its history and current programming.

Even seasoned Chautauquans talk about feeling overwhelmed by the breadth and depth of opportunities for learning, recreation, spiritual practice and arts in a single day on the grounds. But for those who have logged many a summer here, it may be hard to remember how vast the landscape first seemed, how interesting and various the architecture, how daunting the grid of streets winding up and down the ravines and over to the lake. Thank goodness for that singular red brick walk that runs through it all, which, as a first time Chautauquan, can bring you back to someplace familiar.

These days, at any given moment in the Chautauqua season, one third of the people on the grounds are brand new to the Institution, says vice president and chief marketing officer George Murphy. Moreover, changing lifestyles and patterns of vacation tend to bring first-time families to Chautauqua for shorter stays.

Despite the expansion of information about Chautauqua that’s now available on the Institution’s website, newcomers arrive and still say on surveys that they feel overwhelmed. Finding venues, restrooms, or figuring out how to get theater tickets can seem like a waste of precious time to guests and may lead to a less-than-satisfactory experience. What do you mean I can’t change clothes at the beach? Where do I catch the tram? What is Special Studies? they ask.

“We tend to forget,” Murphy says, “there’s so much to figure out.”

For 2013, a familiar space on Bestor Plaza is being upfitted to tackle some of these issues for first-time visitors. The new Chautauqua Visitors Center will be located in the space adjacent to the Post Office in the wing opposite the Afterwords Café. (The publications office, which had been housed in the space, is moving to the police station. In turn, the Police Department is moving to the old Chautauqua Fire Hall.)

The overall goal of the center is to welcome, educate and demystify the Chautauqua experience for all visitors to Chautauqua. The handsome rectangular room, with its 16-foot ceilings and tall windows, will have a circular information desk at the center. The information staff, once housed at the Colonnade, will now help new and returning Chautauquans to get whatever information they need to have a full experience during their stay.

Myra Peterson, Chautauqua’s primary resource for housing inquiries, will also be on-site, helping visitors use a group of computer stations and printers to explore accommodations for a return visit.

Another fundamental goal of the new center is to encourage repeat visits to the Institution.

The center will also feature media displays, artifacts and videos that tell the story of Chautauqua—its history and current programming. Conveying the mission and values of Chautauqua will be primary, and guests will have a chance to sign up for various mailing lists, participate in customer service surveys and offer ideas for enhancing their stay at Chautauqua.

One idea under consideration is to invite different local realtors to be on hand to answer questions about accommodations and available properties each Wednesday during the season. A group of Chautauqua volunteers, trained to help newcomers understand the culture and current work of the Institution, will also be available to answer their questions about particular aspects of the program. Other weekly meet-and-greet events will be hosted in the space, along with regularly scheduled Q-and-A sessions.

Other Marketing Initiatives

In addition to opening the new Visitors Center, Murphy’s team is continuing to spread the word about Chautauqua through advertising targeted to cities in the immediate region and beyond. His department is also working with the Education and Program offices to encourage more partnership broadcasts of Chautauqua performances and events with WNED, WQED, WVIZ and others. Marketing is also investing in messages on adult and children’s programs on PBS and NPR to deepen awareness of the Institution with those audiences—a natural fit with the mission and values of Chautauqua.

The primary vehicle to communicate with younger families about Chautauqua is still the Internet and social media, Murphy says, but he believes that targeting the 45- to 65-year-old cohort is likely to be the most fruitful in terms of new and repeat guests. People in this age group are more likely to be able to afford to bring their children and grandchildren to visit and are more likely to eventually invest in housing on the grounds, whereas younger families in their 30s and 40s are not generally in a position to purchase second homes, Murphy explains.

At the same time, Murphy has set a goal of increasing by 10 percent the number of groups who book rooms by at least 5 or 6 percent. There is still capacity for such growth on the grounds, in youth programs and at the hotel, Murphy says.
Every summer for the past 15 years, Barb Mackey has driven east from her home in central Ohio to spend a week at Chautauqua. “And every time I cross the state line from Pennsylvania into New York,” she explains, “I cry tears of joy.” New York state is Mackey’s birthplace, while Chautauqua Institution is her “spiritual home.”

As a newly retired university administrator with an Ed.D. in adult education, Mackey considers Chautauqua to be “the quintessential lifelong learning experience.” It was her strong passion for adult learning and her deep connection to the spiritual aspects of Chautauqua that inspired Mackey to respond to the news of Joan Brown Campbell’s retirement with a major gift to the Department of Religion.

Mackey says she was excited by Joan’s vision of Chautauqua becoming “a spiritual Camp David,” as described in the cover story in the last issue of Pillars. After talking with Karen Blozie of the Joan Brown Campbell Endowment Fund, Mackey knew what she wanted to do. Her major gift, through the combination of yearly gifts and ultimately, through a bequest, will launch the Joan Brown Campbell Endowment in the Department of Religion.

Mackey made her first visit to the grounds in the 1970s. She was working at SUNY Fredonia at the time. “We drove over on a Sunday, and the place was not very well kept up in those days. Then when I came back 20 years later and saw how people had taken care of their properties, I was truly impressed.”

As an accomplished cellist and teacher of the instrument, Mackey especially enjoys the chamber music programming at Chautauqua, and directing Elderhostel programs. But most of all she is grateful to her parents. She considers it a tremendous responsibility to steward their many gifts to the place she occasionally experienced a religious divide between Christians and Jews, Mackey says she didn’t understand the Abrahamic concept until she came to Chautauqua and had a visceral experience during the Institution’s annual Abrahamic Sacred Song Service.

“This understanding of our ancient heritage is so important to living in the world today,” she says. Fostering Chautauqua’s role as a convector of interfaith dialogue feels like the highest use of her personal resources. But Mackey is also quick to emphasize that her gift would not have been possible without the lifelong hard work and faithfulness of her parents, Ruth B. and Thomas F. Mackey, who were very involved in their churches as Barb was growing up—first in Schenectady and later in Scarsdale. Tom Mackey was a regional manager in industrial sales for General Electric and died suddenly of a heart attack only four days before his scheduled retirement. “That makes the resources he left us even more precious to me,” Barb says.

Mackey’s devoted mother Ruth grew up in a little town a hundred miles east of Chautauqua and once visited the Institution with her parents. “I say I’m a third-generation Chautauquan,” Barb laughs. “But my mother was actually very small when she came here that one time with my grandparents. All she remembered were the steep hills on the grounds.”

Mackey made her first visit to the grounds in the 1970s. She was working at SUNY Fredonia at the time. “We drove over on a Sunday, and the place was not very well kept up in those days. Then when I came back 20 years later and saw how people had taken care of their properties, I was truly impressed.”

As an accomplished cellist and teacher of the instrument, Mackey especially enjoys the chamber music programming at Chautauqua, and directing Elderhostel programs. But most of all she is grateful to her parents. She considers it a tremendous responsibility to steward their many gifts to the place she occasionally experienced a religious divide between Christians and Jews, Mackey says she didn’t understand the Abrahamic concept until she came to Chautauqua and had a visceral experience during the Institution’s annual Abrahamic Sacred Song Service.

“The understanding of our ancient heritage is so important to living in the world today,” she says. Fostering Chautauqua’s role as a convector of interfaith dialogue feels like the highest use of her personal resources. But Mackey is also quick to emphasize that her gift would not have been possible without the lifelong hard work and faithfulness of her parents, Ruth B. and Thomas F. Mackey, who were very involved in their churches as Barb was growing up—first in Schenectady and later in Scarsdale. Tom Mackey was a regional manager in industrial sales for General Electric and died suddenly of a heart attack only four days before his scheduled retirement. “That makes the resources he left us even more precious to me,” Barb says.

Mackey’s devoted mother Ruth grew up in a little town a hundred miles east of Chautauqua and once visited the Institution with her parents. “I say I’m a third-generation Chautauquan,” Barb laughs. “But my mother was actually very small when she came here that one time with my grandparents. All she remembered were the steep hills on the grounds.”

Ultimately it is gratitude that drives Barb Mackey now. She is thankful for the opportunities she’s had in her career—running camps for gifted and talented children, leading community music education programs for children and adults, and directing Elderhostel programs. But most of all she is grateful to her parents. She considers it a tremendous responsibility to steward their many gifts to the place she occasionally experienced a religious divide between Christians and Jews, Mackey says she didn’t understand the Abrahamic concept until she came to Chautauqua and had a visceral experience during the Institution’s annual Abrahamic Sacred Song Service.

“The understanding of our ancient heritage is so important to living in the world today,” she says. Fostering Chautauqua’s role as a convector of interfaith dialogue feels like the highest use of her personal resources. But Mackey is also quick to emphasize that her gift would not have been possible without the lifelong hard work and faithfulness of her parents, Ruth B. and Thomas F. Mackey, who were very involved in their churches as Barb was growing up—first in Schenectady and later in Scarsdale. Tom Mackey was a regional manager in industrial sales for General Electric and died suddenly of a heart attack only four days before his scheduled retirement. “That makes the resources he left us even more precious to me,” Barb says.

Mackey’s devoted mother Ruth grew up in a little town a hundred miles east of Chautauqua and once visited the Institution with her parents. “I say I’m a third-generation Chautauquan,” Barb laughs. “But my mother was actually very small when she came here that one time with my grandparents. All she remembered were the steep hills on the grounds.”
From Page to Stage:

CHQ LITERARY PROGRAMS THRIVE

Writing is a solitary act—often lonely and punctuated by doubt. For even the most accomplished writer, the blank page of a new project can intimidate. Pressure builds when a book contract is already signed, an advance has been paid, and a deadline is within sight. Adding to this perennial condition of writers’ angst is the present-day churn in the publishing industry—mergers have lowered the count of major publishing houses in New York to the fingers of one hand. Meanwhile, the world of e-books has added scores of old and new books—self-published and small runs—to a glutted information marketplace. While the audience for literature has arguably broadened through so many new channels, the phenomenon has not necessarily added quality nor raised the standard of living for many writers.

In such an environment, The Chautauqua Prize, awarded for the first time in 2012, has already become an exquisite affirmation of the highest standards in craft. It is also a welcome lift to writers’ spirits and a balm in challenging times. Or as the first winner of the prize, Andrew Krivak, put it at his reading on the grounds in August: “Writers are often alone in a room with words and then someone suddenly says you’re not alone, we are reading your work. And that feels good.”

Upon learning of Chautauqua’s selection of Krivak’s novel The Sojourn, publisher Erika Goldman of Bellevue Literary Press said, “It is humbling to receive an honor of such magnitude from this august organization. The Chautauqua Institution not only values literary writing, but also the unique relationship that forms between a reader and writer.”

“The Chautauqua Prize has actually given me a kind of spiritual boost as a writer,” says Krivak. “I knew that my novel The Sojourn would never be a best-seller, and that its life was likely to be a quiet and obscure one, if it had any life at all. So when I was told that I won the Chautauqua Prize, I thought: Wow! Here’s a place where books are loved and read for their depth and breadth and complexity of story and language, and the people there love my book enough to bestow this prize on it. To me, that kind of readership, that kind of communal commitment to literature, is almost as important to a writer as the act of writing itself.”

“The Sojourn was chosen for its depth and beauty,” says Sherra Babcock, Emily and Richard Smucker Chair for Education, “but author Andrew Krivak was a perfect choice as well. We did not know, when the book was chosen, that we’d be honoring an author so exemplary of Chautauquan qualities of humility, intelligence and honesty. He and Amelia and their three children were all over the grounds during their visit!”

When Babcock was initially researching existing literary prizes to identify a niche that Chautauqua’s award might fill, the publishers, authors, critics and other prize administrators she contacted were very encouraging. “There is no other major prize that celebrates both reading and writing, which was our idea from the beginning,” says Babcock. “The most striking idea seemed to be that of the Chautauqua reader—described by one Writers’ Center workshop leader as ‘generous of spirit, time and attention.’” As the Chautauqua Writers’ Center website puts it: “The Chautauqua reader is compelled to question, and recognizes the sense of place, the sharply drawn character, and the storytelling power of a great work of narrative/literary nonfiction or fiction.”

Chautauquans who are literary agents, booksellers, teachers of creative writing and literature, librarians, critics and published writers—currently working in the field and retired—serve as the first-round readers for the books submitted for consideration. “These 46 Chautauquans, who each read an average eight books per year, have proved to be a thoughtful and deliberate group of judges,” says Babcock.

Babcock notes that the prize has added a new dimension to the literary offerings of Chautauqua—in the excitement surrounding the selection process, in the recognition bestowed on the shortlist of finalists and the winner, and through the CLSC’s choice of some of the entries for their list as well. The prize has also captured the attention of the literary world. Sixty-five books from 36 publishers were submitted for the first contest in 2012. This year the number of entries nearly doubled, with 125 books from 67 publishers. First-round reviews are in, forming a longlist of 30 titles. An anonymous, three-person jury will select the shortlist and the 2013 recipient, and announce them separately this spring.
Honoring Playwrights

Only a year before The Chautauqua Prize made its debut, the John C. Court Family Foundation established another literary prize, the Chautauqua Play Commission. The first commission went to playwright Kate Fodor who was in residence on the grounds to work on a new play during the 2011 season. At the time of her award, Fodor had been named among “Eight to Watch” in the theater world by The New York Times. Her plays 100 Saints You Should Know and Rx had been part of the Chautauqua Theater Company’s New Play Workshop program in 2008 and 2009, respectively, and were then produced off Broadway to positive reviews. (Chautauqua’s Ethan McSweeny directed both New York productions.)

Through the play commission, which is a project jointly administered by CTC and the Chautauqua Writers’ Center, Fodor also offered a master class in playwriting at the Writers’ Center. Of this collaboration Writers’ Center director Clara Silverstein says, “We are fortunate to arrange for the playwright to work with students who are interested in dramatic writing. Workshop participants benefit from a professional’s wisdom and guidance in the creative process.”

“These courses also allow the playwright to get to know fellow writers, those poets and prose writers-in-residence, and their students,” Babcock adds.

When Kate Fodor returned to Chautauqua for the 2012 season, she was ready with the script for Fifty Ways, which was CTC’s first-ever world premiere. McSweeny directed the new play.

“New work has really become central to our mission, vision and programming,” says CTC artistic director Vivienne Benesch. “Over the past 10 years, CTC has solidified its position as a destination for emerging talent in theater. We’ve been drawing A-list students for our school for a while now, and with the New Play Workshop program, we are also drawing the most promising playwrights. We fit well into Chautauqua’s strong literary tradition. We are taking works from page to stage now.”

In addition to the play commission, CTC’s annual staged readings offer a significant advantage to a writer’s work in progress. Instead of actors simply reading their parts from a script on a music stand, the readings are supported by design fellows who tackle the scenery and blocking so that writers can see their work take visual shape.

“Playwrights have said that for the first time in this process, they have actually gotten to see the rhythms of their play,” Benesch explains. “The actors in these performances never just read a stage direction. It must be done as part of the action.” Therefore the process also creates powerful learning experiences for members of the repertory company.

“We rehearse the staged readings on Monday, open the show on Tuesday, and have a chance for the audience to talk back after each performance,” Benesch says. “These plays thus become part of what is the quintessential Chautauqua dialogue. It is exactly what Ethan and I set out to do with the New Play Workshop.”

The milestone that the play commission represents thrills Benesch. “It sends a strong message of support and commitment to the writer’s process,” she says.

The Chautauqua Play Commission will continue every other year. In the 2013 season, Molly Smith Metzler will be in residence at the Writers’ Center, teaching and working on the commission. CTC will do a New Play Workshop reading or a full production of the commission in 2014, depending on the stage of the work when the residency is done. “Kate Fodor gave us a draft of Fifty Ways in November of 2011, and it was a whole play already, so we leapt on the idea of the world premiere for 2012,” Benesch explains.

“Every Chautauqua should feel pride in ownership of this commission,” she continues. “For a seasonal company to do so much new work is rare. Even more extraordinary is the climate we are working in. Chautauquans are adventurous and curious audiences. Our mission is to engage, entertain, and challenge. My favorite part is engaging with the Chautauqua audience.”

Multimedia Editor joins The Chautauquan Daily Staff

A new staffer charged with covering events on the grounds with video and audio components will join The Chautauquan Daily newsroom this summer.

Editor Matt Ewalt explains: “The multimedia editor will work closely with our web editor, a position we’ve had in place for two years. In addition to sharing all of our stories from the printed Daily online (which we’ve been doing for two years), we want to find innovative ways of engaging readers through social media and multimedia projects.”

Daily reporters and photographers are all encouraged to pursue multimedia projects throughout the summer—from audio slide shows to interactive timelines. Daily stories also appear on Facebook and Twitter, and the Storify platform gathers voices of the Chautauqua community each day during the season.

For the 2013 season, the new multimedia editor will play a pivotal role in telling the story of the The Ramee and Julet Project interarts collaboration through stories, photographs, timelines, audio and video interviews, slideshows and other interactive projects.

“We’re blessed with two dozen of the country’s most talented young journalists on staff each summer,” Ewalt says, “and it’s to their benefit—and certainly this community’s benefit—to tap into their multimedia training to tell the Chautauqua story.

One of the most valuable aspects of our internship program is the level of community engagement on the grounds—unlike anything these multimedia editors have experienced before. Our work online does not replace our work in print; rather, it allows us to think about how to connect Chautauquans on and off the grounds and experiment with new ways of storytelling.”

Above left: Playwright Kate Fodor. Left: A scene from her play Fifty Ways, produced at Chautauqua in 2012.
While this yearly occurrence is At times during the late summer, Though the lakefront properties within the Chautauqua Institution grounds make up only 1.5 miles of the 41 total miles of shoreline around Chautauqua Lake, the Institution has been working in tackling the degradation of water quality and wildlife habitat that is most apparent here each year from mid to late summer. For Chautauquans who might not be on the grounds in August when the water generally reaches its highest temperature, the condition is unmistakable. Dean Gowen, a landscape architect out of Buffalo, has been working with Chautauqua’s director of operations, Doug Conroe, to examine the causes of declining water quality and to propose a range of solutions. Gowen’s comprehensive report on the Chautauqua shoreline was presented to the Institution’s board of trustees in February. The document vividly describes and illustrates through numerous photographs how the build up of blue-green algae reaches a peak in late summer and early fall as the waters stagnate:

“While this yearly occurrence is nothing new, and has actually been recorded for decades, the extent of the nuisance and residual impact has increased with the continued nutrient-enriched run-off from various sources around the lake. At times during the late summer, much of the lake appears to take on a greenish hue similar to a green oil slick or thick film. These annual “Harmful Algae Blooms” are harmful to humans and potentially fatal to animals. At the same time, through sediment build-up, algae growth and continued erosion, a very undesirable sludge accumulates along the shoreline edge, making access to the lake waters extremely distasteful to residents and visitors.”

The simple fact is that when it rains, stormwater at Chautauqua runs downhill and into the lake, picking up harmful residues and nutrients from fertilizer and other sources along the way. Most street run-off still dumps directly into catch basins and is piped directly into the lake. In the late few years Conroe’s staff has implemented a series of proactive mitigation measures and strategies to divert some of the stormwater from upland areas on the Chautauqua grounds into rain gardens and bioswales. Other efforts to better manage the flow of contaminated water in the ravines have created mechanisms to slow the flow of water so that it might soak into the ground and otherwise clean itself before reaching the lake. New wetland areas, particularly around the golf course, are also being developed to control the surge of stormwater into Chautauqua Lake. The natural landscape setting established around Fletcher Music Hall was also a major effort to mitigate run-off from the adjacent parking lots and roof structures.

Two different public meetings, held last season, reported to the community on the progress of the shoreline study and staff answered questions posed by residents about stormwater and shoreline issues. The concerns of those attending the meetings were then incorporated into ongoing planning.

The shoreline report addresses the next phase of work—stabilizing and further naturalizing the portions of the Institution’s shoreline with native plantings, and reducing, where possible, the presence of mowed lawns immediately adjacent to the water’s edge. Mitigating erosion and constant scouring of the lake bottom below existing concrete sea walls is another concern.

“The report was enthusiastically received by the board,” Conroe says, “and now we are moving to the next phase of developing cost estimates for implementation and identifying start-up projects along Chautauqua’s shoreline.”

The report urged the Institution to promote a more naturalized landscape along the waterfront, while also respecting residential views of the lake, access to the water, traditional uses and overall aesthetics. “The challenge is to balance and accommodate all these factors while insuring the future health needs and sustainability of the lake for recreation and wildlife for generations to come,” Gowen says.

The initial projects to come this spring and summer will begin to restore natural habitats and reduce erosion in areas that will have the least impact on access. In some cases invasive and exotic vegetation will be removed and replaced with native plants. In particular, Gowen says, the presence of invasive Japanese knotweed is a serious problem. The report also notes that there are also some lawn areas which serve little function and require extensive maintenance, especially on the steeper slopes. Run-off from buildings, pavements, and manicured slopes is not slowed down, resulting in soil erosion and potential contaminants entering the lake. Establishing “no-mow” zones and developing attractive natural plantings in certain areas will actually cut back on high mowing costs. These initial projects will allow Chautauquans the opportunity to observe the benefits of stormwater mitigation. At the same time that the Institution is beginning its shoreline projects, the shoreline report lists a number of other attractive shoreline improvements already taking place around the lake (see box). The list confirms the growing momentum toward improving water quality in Chautauqua Lake, in part a result of the Institution’s leadership and Conroe’s work with state and local officials.

Maple Springs Common Land, south of the Maple Springs Creek: a 10- to 15-foot buffer area has become a no-mow area. A 150-foot stretch at the lakewest was also planted with native perennials to produce a more garden-like buffer area in front of a condominium complex.

Chautauqua Shores installed a perennial planting buffer area at its common area. The property association also provides a financial rebate to any homeowner who installs a buffer area on their private property. Another initiative is currently under way to upgrade the ravine and drainage course which traverses the community, including potential rain gardens and, where appropriate, bioswales.

Wahmeda intends to install a buffer strip along its common land in the spring of 2013. This is being undertaken by their property manager.

The Villas have allowed their shoreline to be a no-mow area for many years. They also augmented several sections with native perennials.

Point Chautauqua has a group of active gardeners who are installing rain gardens and perennial gardens on their private properties. They are doing this because of the steep hillside nature of their development. They also hope their actions will influence the manager of their common lakewest area to install a buffer strip at the shore.

Lighthouse Point installed a perennial garden buffer strip along their common lakewest property.
At its February meeting, the Chautauqua Institution Board of Trustees had a look at the next iteration of drawings completed by the Design Development Team charged with the historic rehabilitation of Chautauqua’s Amphitheater. The second phase of the project design is nearly complete. The design team includes Mitchell Kurtz of Mitchell P. Kurtz Associates in New York City, Michael Conroe of Wendell A-E in Buffalo, and Mark Permar of Permar Inc. in Charleston, S.C. Marty Serena of Serena Sturm Architects in Chicago is leading the team. “We’re in a really good place with the design now,” he says.

According to Serena, the designers set about their work with six major goals:

- to maintain a strong connectivity between the Amp and its surroundings;
- to improve the functionality of the building both for audience members and Serena following the trustees’ session, to receive updated information and to offer guidance for the project. The construction estimator continued to explore options for cost savings before delivering his final estimate to the group in March. The group also responded to a few questions that came up during the most recent series of meetings, says Chautauqua capital projects manager John Shedd.

By the 2013 season, the team expects to have a three-dimensional model (either digital or physical) of the design that Chautauquans will be able to see at various locations on the grounds.

“The third phase of the project is to complete the construction documents and then to begin the bidding process,” says Shedd. Though some had hoped construction might commence in 2013, it now appears that the project will not begin before the fall of 2014.

Several improvements have been developed in this second major phase of the project. The designers have been able to maintain the standing room capacity that is available in the current Amp configuration, though the standing areas have been relocated slightly. The size of the back of the house has been selectively and carefully reduced from earlier plans to improve efficiency with the added benefit of reduced cost. The original back and side walls of the historic Massey Memorial Organ chamber will be showcased within a multi-story interior open space with enhanced lighting in the main interior passageways of the back of the house. The exterior design concept includes glazing on the lake side that will provide a glimpse of the organ chamber from the exterior as well. The exterior style of the back of the house is detailed with finishes and elements that mimic the original structure “while improving the overall look of the exterior design,” Shedd explains.

Fundraising for the project has continued, keeping pace with the design completion. “We still seek a lead gift in the vicinity of $10 million,” says Chautauqua Foundation CEO Geof Follansbee. “A project of this scope requires this level of philanthropic leadership.” Foundation officers have been meeting with individuals with the capacity to provide such gifts and are hopeful that the project can maintain a schedule to allow the project to be bid in the spring of 2014.

“We have listened to the Institution and I believe we have worked well together as a design team,” Serena says. “The fundraising will continue, and we are excited about the idea that the Chautauqua community will be able to see a rehabilitated Amphitheater that is ready to serve Chautauqua Institution for generations to come.”

Illustrations: Serena Sturm Architects
A Bat’s-Eye View of Chautauqua

A few years ago, Caroline Bissell, known by many Chautauquans as “The Bat Lady,” hired a tree service to thin the monumental trees on her property at the corner of Emerson and Wythe. Bissell cares for one of the oldest and tallest trees on the grounds—a giant silver maple at the front of her lot that is about 105 feet tall. When the crew arrived to work on her trees, they had brought both a cherry picker and an even taller crane. “I love heights,” Bissell explains, so when the trimmers asked if she’d like to go up in the bucket of the cherry picker, she instantly agreed. After a quick lesson on how to navigate the bucket up, down, and sideways, Bissell was lifted 60 feet up to survey the trees and her neighborhood from a totally new perspective. “It was thrilling,” she says.

Then the crew asked if she’d like to go up higher, attached below the ball of the crane. This more daring ride required Bissell to be fastened to the crane strap. She was instructed to hold on fiercely, lest she flip backwards and hang wrong-side-up, like a bat, from the crane. She nevertheless managed to carry a camera and shoot some photos from 100 feet above her property. The view was thrilling: “I could see halfway down the lake, and just thinking about how so many species of bats live in the trees of Chautauqua was a joy for me.” Bissell thus achieved a bat’s-eye view of Chautauqua, not an everyday sort of opportunity. This rare experience literally heightened Bissell’s awareness of Chautauqua’s magnificent trees.

“Trees represent history, centuries of strength. They tolerate our abuse and provide canopies, flowers, nuts and shade, and host wildlife,” she says.

In appreciation of Chautauqua’s trees, Bissell has made a significant gift through her estate that will continue to grow throughout her lifetime and contribute to the sustainability of Chautauqua’s trees in perpetuity.

Linda Steckley of the Chautauqua Foundation worked with Bissell to structure the gift. “When you think of all the time that Caroline has given to the Institution through her talks about bats, her dedication and financial commitment to ensure the sustainability of the trees and bat habitat is enormously generous,” Steckley says. “The weather is pretty wild and woolly at times here, and the trees often take quite a beating. Disease is also an ongoing concern. Preserving and protecting our trees is an essential part of the Chautauqua experience for so many people.”

Bissell will also continue sharing her expertise about Chautauqua’s treasured bat population. Every Wednesday at 4:15 p.m., after she dons her bat socks and bat jewelry, assembles her educational posters and bagged samples of bat guano, Bissell greets between 50 and 150 Chautauquans at Smith Wilkes Hall and launches into another Bat Chat—an educational presentation sponsored by the Chautauqua Bird, Tree and Garden Club. Bissell inherited this labor of love from naturalist Bill Mealy and has given a talk every week of every season since 2000. To prepare, she read some 30 books about bats and consolidated the information into her one-hour talk. Kids love the bat rings and coloring sheets she also hands out.

The fascination with bats also led Bissell to Brazil where she lived on a riverboat in the Amazon for 16 days, capturing various bats for study, including nectar bats, fruit bats, numerous vampire bats and an incredibly hungry, two-inch banana bat that managed to make off with half a banana one night.

Bissell has always loved nature, science and wild animals: “My church is the outdoors,” she explains. Bissell’s mother bought the family’s Chautauqua house and three lots in 1949. Caroline grew up going to Boys’ and Girls’ Club and later worked as a counselor on the waterfront for many summers. Widowed at age 25, she has been a devoted volunteer and philanthropist all her life, working for the Humane Society and in the women’s movement. Her grandfather, Walter Shaw Sr., was CEO of the G.C. Murphy company, a chain of five-and-dime stores. Her uncle, Walter Shaw Jr., served on the Chautauqua board and also established a fund to help care for the Institution’s trees.

“So tree love must run in the family,” Bissell says. “They mark permanence to me. They’ll be here long after we’re all gone.”

“When you think of all the time that Caroline Bissell has given to the Institution through her bat talks, her dedication and financial commitment to ensure the sustainability of the trees and bat habitat is enormously generous.”

—Linda Steckley, Senior major gifts officer
“It would be a wonderful thing for families on their last day here to talk about what inspired them this season and what they want to do about it. We ought to be asking ourselves on a regular basis, ‘What am I going to do for my community when I get back home?’”

—Linda Silverberg

Taking Chautauqua Home: DAN AND LINDA SILVERBERG

After coming to Chautauqua for only a couple of weeks each summer for some 25 years, Dan and Linda Silverberg of Cleveland and Palm Beach Gardens finally added a third home on Root Avenue in 2009. They placed their Chautauqua property in a trust for their five children and six grandchildren. The only requirement (besides upkeep of the house) is that the entire family must gather at the Institution at least once a year. The Silverbergs also joined the Bestor Society, becoming major supporters of the Institution. They want to ensure that the Chautauqua experience they enjoy now is supported for future generations.

The Silverbergs’ commitment to sharing Chautauqua with their extended family is motivated, they say, by a recognition of their privilege. As Linda puts it: “When you’re at Chautauqua it’s almost impossible not to absorb by osmosis the sense of civility and manners, the sense of caring and community. We’d all like to see more of that where we live back home, and we’d like to share this kind of experience with more people, but let’s face it, Chautauqua is expensive and not everyone can afford to come here. We have to start with the notion that ours is a position of privilege, and with privilege comes an obligation to go forth and use what we learn here, to get involved in our communities back home.”

Linda suggests that this reality is no different than how it was for the original Sunday school teachers who first came to Chautauqua in the 1870s for inspiration and renewal with the aim that they might become better teachers back in their home churches.

“My vision would be for Chautauquans nowadays to have a winter obligation when they go back home.” Referring to the 2012 Week Three theme “Inspire. Commit. Act.,” Silverberg says, “That should be the motto of this place, not just a week’s theme. It would be a wonderful thing for families on their last day here to talk about what inspired them this season and what they want to do about it. We ought to be asking ourselves on a regular basis, ‘What am I going to do for my community when I get back home?’”

Dan, sitting across from his wife on their wide front porch, smiles at Linda’s animation and her passion for activism. Vision is apparently a word she uses often. In her college years, she was active in the civil rights and women’s movements, then earned a law degree and practiced for a number of years before being appointed to Ohio’s Common Pleas bench. She served as a trial judge for a number of years and has continued to hear cases as a retired judge, filling in for colleagues.

While still in their first marriages, Dan and Linda met in the early 1970s. “Linda was singing with a small group,” Dan says, “and I thought, that is a neat-looking lady who can really sing.” Fifteen years later they ran into each other again. They’ve now been married for 24 years.

Dan is a semi-retired real estate developer who took up painting eight years ago. “His work is abstract without being absurd,” Linda explains. “His paintings are very geometrical, like van Gogh’s irises, with lots of color. Very good.” She laughs, explaining that Dan has recently bought a complicated easel that “looks like a replica of the torture rack in the movie ‘Braveheart.’”

The Silverbergs stay busy during the Chautauqua season. Beyond entertaining each grandchild for a week at a time, they take in the lectures most mornings and enjoy the music and Special Studies classes in particular.

While Dan is busy painting, Linda writes. She published her first novel last year, a legal thriller called Punishment. She has plans for two more books—Blame and Innocence—to round out the trilogy. She wryly jokes that Innocence may be a very short book. All three are based on her long experience in the courtroom. More seriously, however, she explains that she’s writing about the U.S. justice system—the human tendency to rush to judgment, how identity and stereotype may contribute to who gets punished or blamed, and who manages to get away with criminal acts without consequence.

Linda says she is most grateful to her teachers at the pre-season Chautauqua Writers’ Festival and her mentors in the Special Studies program, particularly novelist Janice Eidus, author of The War of the Rosens. This year, in between the first and second novel, Linda is preparing to publish a collection of short stories.

Still, with all these activities, being with family is primary to the Silverbergs, hence their commitment to re-creating the kind of close-knit family life they experienced as children. “We grew up in an era when the extended family—cousins, aunts and uncles—was just up the street and around the corner. Every occasion was a family occasion,” Linda says. “Our grandchildren’s lives did not include that sense of family as community—that is, until they came to Chautauqua.”

Chautauqua Fund Spokesman

TOUCHES HIS AUDIENCE

Chautauquan Justin Kuhn celebrated his bar mitzvah in February—a significant rite of passage in a young man’s life—but those who’ve met Justin would hardly say that he’s been waiting to come of age before taking on life, full force. Justin has been singing and acting on stage in his hometown of Tampa, Fla., since he was 4. He made his debut in a winter concert. “I remember I was really shy and a little bit nervous, and then I just started hamming it up,” he says, grinning.

“He stole the show,” his mother, Susie Kuhn, adds quietly.

Justin went on to perform in a number of musical cabarets and has also won parts in a range of musicals presented at the Patel Conservatory at the Straz Performing Arts Center in Tampa Bay, including Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory, Annie and Grease, and has been in local productions of A Christmas Carol and The King and I. He was also involved in the creation of a new show—Cubicle! The Musical—a spoof of the movie “Office Space.”

When Justin’s grandmother, Blossom Leibowitz, brought her daughter Susie to Chautauqua for the first time on a trip with National Geographic in 2009, they both knew Justin would love the place. Now a veteran of three summers on the grounds, Justin is a dedicated volunteer with the Chautauqua Theater Company, delivering popcorn every Friday to cast, crew and volunteers. Also, with the help of his family, he has established the Justin Kuhn Theater Scholarship Fund to help support a conservatory actor. “They have encouraged me to be proactive. They always say, ‘You can.’ If someone tells you those words,” Justin explains, “your feelings just boost up automatically. For example, you can do something to improve Chautauqua even if it’s just picking up a piece of paper in the park or donating a dollar to the Chautauqua Fund every day. Just do something!”

Justin’s passion for theater is demanding of his time. Back home in Tampa he is often in rehearsals after school and well into the evening several nights a week, even during exams. Susie says achieving a balanced life with so much extracurricular activity makes playing sports, for example, hard to fit in. “But he’s so happy when he’s in a play,” she says.

Justin attributes his eagerness and confidence to his parents. “They have encouraged me to be proactive. They always say, ‘You can.’ If someone tells you those words,” Justin explains, “your feelings just boost up automatically. For example, you can do something to improve Chautauqua even if it’s just picking up a piece of paper in the park or donating a dollar to the Chautauqua Fund every day. Just do something!”

Justin’s can-do enthusiasm has not been lost on his younger brother Jackson, who began painting rocks and selling them on Bestor Plaza last summer to raise money for the Chautauqua Fund. Susie says Jackson wants to raise enough funds to give a School of Art scholarship.

During his interview with Pillars for this piece, Justin’s spontaneous enthusiasm about Chautauqua philanthropy led to his appearance in a short video sent out this fall to Chautauquans. Justin speaks enthusiastically on behalf of the Chautauqua Fund and his appreciation of the Institution. The video also shows the enormous range of activities on the grounds that donations to the Chautauqua Fund help to underwrite. In his voice-over, Justin offers his best hopes for Chautauqua’s future and declares his intention to be a part of it every summer for the rest of his life.

Chautauqua Fund Director Tina Downey says the video went viral and was shared widely among the Chautauqua community. “A number of folks picked up the phone and sent e-mails to tell me how touched they were at hearing from a young person who understands the impact of Chautauqua on his family. Justin was such an honest and authentic voice, and he is right about how important every gift to the Fund is to the operation of Chautauqua—no matter how small or large.”

To view Justin’s video, visit: https://chautauquafoundation.org/index.php/chautauqua-fund