

# ComMuniTy

## Department of Communication, Media and Theatre

I L L I N O I S U N I V E R S I T Y

Welcome to the seventh issue of **ComMuniTy**, the annual newsletter of the Department of Communication, Media and Theatre (CMT) at NEIU. **ComMuniTy** allows us to maintain contact with CMT alumni, inform alumni and current students about the CMT program, and celebrate our successes as students, alumni, faculty, and as a department.

CMT continues to be one of NEIU's top 10 majors (#8)—a distinction we have held since 2010, and a distinction we owe to the interest and enthusiasm of our students, as well as the talent and dedication of our faculty and staff.

Stage Center Theatre had another great year of performances. Fall 2015 featured two comedies: Gina Gionfriddo's *Becky Shaw*, directed by **John Bliss**, and an original adaptation of Aristophanes' *Wealth*, directed by Derek van Barham. Spring 2016 featured Suzan-Lori Parks' Pulitzer Prize winning drama, *In the Blood*, directed by **Angela Sweigart-Gallagher**, and *Death Defying Acts*, a comedy directed by **Rodney Higginbotham**. **Ann Hartdegen** and the Children's Theatre Workshop crew also performed *Walk! Don't Ride!* (Fall 2015) and *King Midas and the Golden Touch* (Spring 2016).

**Shayne Pepper** maintained our partnership with the Northwest Chicago Film Society. In 2015-16, 29 feature films were screened and more than 3000 tickets were sold. Two of the films—*Follow Thru* (1930) and *So This is Paris* (1926)—had not been seen by audiences in more than 80 years. The partnership has received great press, including from the *Chicago Tribune*, *Chicago Reader*, *WTTW*, and *Crain's Business Chicago*.

**Eddie Rubinowitz**, **Linda Leyva**, and **Erick Lopez** partnered with CMT alum **Tim McMahon** and the NEIU Office of Career Services to coordinate the second annual CMT Internship Fair. More than 150 students and 30 employers attended the event, including Chicago Public Media, The Chicago Reporter, and Comedy Club.

CMT excels with student and faculty research. In November 2015, five CMT faculty members—**Wilfredo Alvarez**, **Ann Hartdegen**, **Cyndi Moran**, **Angela Sweigart-Gallagher**, and **Shayne Pepper**—participated in the NEIU Faculty Research and Creative Activities Symposium. In April 2016, eight CMT students—**GeGe Carr**, **Daniel Dadesho**, **Leland Humbertson**, **Mary Kroeck**, **Toreana Meeky**, **Jose Navarette**, **Nadezhda Panayotova**, and **Carrie Reffitt**—presented in the NEIU Student Research and Creative Activities Symposium. **Carrie Reffitt** won a best presentation award for her website, "Sexual Difference and Why It Matters," and **Mary Kroeck** received the Library Award for Excellence in Research.



Cast Photo of *In the Blood* (2016).

Other highlights from the past year: **Melanie Bujan** received an Excellence Award for Teaching, and **Angela-Sweigart Gallagher** received an Excellence Award for Research. **Tony Adams**, **Seung-Hwan Mun**, **Bob Ritsema**, and **John Ross Jr.** were awarded sabbatical/educational leaves, and **Dan Wirth** will take an educational leave Fall 2016. **Cyndi Moran** edited a film on epilepsy research that premiered at the Field Museum. **Bernard J. Brommel** had a paper, "Life in the Dialysis Clinic," accepted for publication; **Tony Adams** co-authored a manuscript with **Michael Kramer**, a 1982 alum of NEIU/CMT and a namesake for one of CMT's annual scholarships; and **Nancy McVittie's** book, *Fade to Gray: Aging in American Cinema*, was published by the University of Texas Press.

There have been noteworthy changes to CMT faculty and staff. **Richard Pierson** and **Ron Mace** retired after more than a decade each of instruction. **Kristin Hunt** took a position at Arizona State University, **Angela Sweigart-Gallagher** moved to St. Lawrence University, and **Shannon Gore** became a lecturer at Arrupe College. **Alan Mace** moved into the College of Arts and Sciences, **Linda Leyva** became the CMT Office Administrator, and **Erick Lopez** has served as our work-study assistant. **G. "Max" Maxin IV** joined our theatre-tech team, and **Sarah Fabian** will join our faculty beginning Fall 2016.

Although 2015-2016 was another year of severe budget cuts to state universities, we will continue to find innovative ways to support our students and maintain a curriculum that meets the needs of an ever-changing workforce. It also has been great watching CMT folks work their CMT magic—their negotiating skills to protect workers' rights; their use of media connections; their ability to facilitate meetings with politicians and engage in letter-writing campaigns; and their willingness to orchestrate an array of public protests.

## ALUMNI UPDATES

With the assistance of CMT graduate student **Erin Sullivan**, we have devoted this entire issue of *ComMuniTy* to alumni updates.

**Taylor Seletos** (B.A., 2015) is an Account Manager for LaSalle Network. She has received numerous awards for her work.

**Robert Schein** (B.A., 2015) is a legal advertising representative with the *Chicago Tribune*. He assists customers with advertising legal notices (Name Changes, Probate Notices, Divorces, Foreclosures). He enjoys the position, is currently looking for other opportunities within the company, and may soon pursue a graduate degree.

**Michalina Maliszewska** (M.A., 2009) is the Coordinator of Graduate Studies at Northeastern Illinois University. She also completed an M.A. in Human Resource Development at NEIU in 2015.

**Avrohom Steinberg** (M.A., 2015) is working with the aging community in Israel and with Livnot U'Lihibanot, a community service program.

**Carolyn Bernal** (M.A., 2013) continues to work at Univision News Studios in Chicago as a freelance operation technician and the weekend assignment desk editor. She is now a new mom to her son Diego Alejandro who was born October 2015.

**Johnny (Jay) Stewart** (B.A., 2003) has been a successful Computer Systems Administrator working in the IT field for about 15 years. He currently holds two Microsoft Certifications, received a Masters in Information Systems from Robert Morris University, and received Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL) certification. He is focusing on PMP certification and beginning a PHD program.

**Lakena Figueroa-Foreman** (B.A., 2011) works as an Office Manager of Student Leadership Development at Northeastern Illinois University. She is currently pursuing a Master's in Higher Education at Chicago State University.

**Matthew Greenberg** (B.A., 2014) is the co-founder of Camberg Editing, a writing and editing company he started with fellow CMT alum, Ashley Campbell. Matthew's talents as a wordsmith have been the foundation for the fervor with which he delivers top-quality results, as a writer when drafting words, and as an editor when fixing words.

**Amanda DiCianni** (B.A., 2010) is an Office Manager at Roberts and Ryan.

**Dale Rivera** (M.A., 2011) is the Chicago Business Development Associate for Zippy Shell, one of the 50 fastest growing companies in the country. He also continues his film and television career, recently appearing as Agent Ramirez on NBC's *Chicago Med*. He can be seen on FOX Television's *Empire* this spring. He currently resides in Chicago with his wife Stefanie and their two children, Eva-Rae and Lorenzo. Stefanie teaches at Roycemore School in Evanston, where Dale conducts occasional acting seminars for drama students.

**Catherine Tondelli** (B.A., 1983) works for HelmsBriscoe an international venue finder in Italy. She met her husband 16 years ago at the Trevi fountain and moved to Italy. She has worked as marketing and business development for an international architectural company, marketing director for a hotel company (The Charming Hotels), VP sales for Premier Hotels and Resorts, and Sales Manager for Travel Click. She specializes in meetings and events for companies all over the world.

**Hugo Rosado** (B.A., 2008) is a Center Manager at FedEx Office. He writes and performs in sketch comedy throughout Chicago.

**Ron Ben-Joseph** (M.A., 2009) is co-owner of, and digital content producer for, Kerramel Media.

**Tammy Czeszewski** (M.A., 2010) works as a Merchandiser for American Greetings.

**Tony Colon** (B.A., 2010; M.A., 2014) served as a creative consultant, camera operator, and performed in *Michael Myers: Absolute Evil*, a fan-film based on the Halloween horror movie franchise.

## 2016-2017 Stage Center Theatre Productions

### November

by David Mamet  
Directed by Rodney Higginbotham  
October 13-15 and October 20-22

### Real Women Have Curves

by Josefina Lopez  
Directed by Mary Kroeck  
December 1-3 and December 8-10

### Cloud 9

by Caryl Churchill  
Directed by John Bliss  
February 23-25 and March 2-4

### End Days

by Deborah Zoe Laufer  
Directed by Dan Wirth  
April 20-22 and April 27-29

**Iona Brinson** (B.A., 2011) is a certified paralegal, specializing in intellectual property at the University of Arizona in Tucson. Iona also holds a post-baccalaureate certification in paralegal studies from Roosevelt University.

**Michael W. Kramer** (M.A., 1982) is Professor and Chair in the Department of Communication at the University of Oklahoma. He teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in group and organizational communication. He has published five books and more than 50 scholarly articles. He recently teamed up with current chair **Tony Adams** to write an entry on ethnography in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Communication Research Methods*. Michael also received the Jablin Award for Outstanding Contributions to Organizational Communication, from the International Communication Association in 2014.)

**John Ruckauf** (B.A., 1998) received a M.A. in International Relations from Webster University (2009). He was recently promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in the US Army. He is currently serving in the Republic of Korea, as the Chief of Ground Forces, for United States Forces Korea.



**Promotion Ceremony. LTC Soo Yeon Lee (ROK Army), LTC John Ruckauf, and Kathy Wahlgren-Ruckauf.**

**Sheenita Robinson** (B.A. 2011) is a wife of 16 years, mother of 4, activist and visionary advocate for children. Working as the Civic and Cultural Engagement Coordinator for Greater Auburn-Gresham Development Corporation, Sheenita bolsters the healthy development of youth in the troubled Auburn-Gresham area by leading the Literacy Gold Summer Camp and supporting the growth of the The Peace Diet Program. Sheenita also does the essential work of educating and training new teachers from Illinois State University on cultural diversity, social justice and restorative methods for teaching in urban schools. Sheenita also finds the time to serve as CEO/Owner of Audacity of HERstory, which celebrates women in business by documenting their successes, their struggles and the Audacity of HERstory!

**Javier Aquino** (B.A., 2015) is pursuing a Master's in Higher Education Leadership at Concordia University Chicago. He currently works in the Graduate Admissions Office at Northeastern Illinois University.

**Nikki Nigl** (M.A., 2012) is FoundHER/ProduceHER/CreateHER of the successful ABOUT WOMEN series: live events, Facebook group, and now YouTube videos. She is also a Public Speaking Skills coach for TED Talk speakers, Women's EmpowHERment Coach, and a weight-loss coach for Weight Watchers. She designs and curates empowHERment workshops. Recently, she was a TEDxNEIU Speaker 2015 (The ABCs of How Women Are Socialized) and a speaker/performer at Milwaukee PrideFest 2016. You can find out more about Nikki at [www.nikkinigl.com](http://www.nikkinigl.com)



**Nikki Nigl prepares to speak about public speaking.**

**Sara Feigenholtz** (B.A., 1979) is a State Representative at State of Illinois. Recently, she was elevated to the position of Assistant Majority Leader in the Illinois House of Representatives. She proudly carries the lessons she learned at NEIU with her today.

**Abraham "Abe" Harb** (B.A., 2015) works in Member Services at Raise.com, an online marketplace for buying and selling gift cards. He recently made his directorial debut in a Bring Your Own Theatre Production and continues to write creatively, mostly poetry and music reviews. For more of his writing, visit [portfolio.abeharb.com](http://portfolio.abeharb.com)

**Samia E. Siddiqui** (B.A., 2014) is a CELTA (Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) certified ESL Teacher and Literacy Coach. She is currently pursuing a M.A. in TESOL and International Teaching at Concordia University (Chicago).

**Alvin Raúl Cardona** (B.A., 2007) received a Master of Science in Journalism from Roosevelt University in 2008. He opened CarTurk, a company working in Illinois as Distributors and Importers of wines, spirits and specialty foods. The skills he gained at NEIU help him on a daily basis with ads, promos, and listening to his team. Traveling and meeting people from various cultural backgrounds also reminds him of being in the diverse classrooms at NEIU.

**Thelma Sardin** (B.A. 2011) is lead marketing communications specialist at LifeSource, Chicagoland's Blood Center. Thelma helps develop blood donor incentive programs, handles media relations, and also implements outreach campaigns to appeal to donors of multicultural backgrounds. Thelma earned a master's degree in journalism from DePaul University in 2013. She has also worked for Mayor Rahm Emanuel and was a print reporter at the Chicago Citizen Newspaper for two years.

**Sally Bianca Berkia** (B.A., 2001) has worked for numerous non-profit organizations, including Oprah's Angel Network, The Rotary Foundation, and currently at Heartland Alliance in Donor and Community Relations. She has formed life-long friendships with many of her NEIU classmates.

**Tim Wambach** (B.A., 1999) will be running 1,200 miles in 40 consecutive days (August 29-October 8) to raise money for Keep On Keeping On (KOKO), a charity he started in 2007. KOKO helps those living with severe physical disabilities. Tim also travels the country in a two-man stage show *Handicap This!* with Mike Berkson who is the inspiration behind KOKO.

**Lynn Levy** (M.A., 1991) is a Manager of Supplemental Instruction (SI) Peer Study Groups and New Student Placement—two college-wide student success programs at Columbia College Chicago. SI improves academic success and retention and New Student Placement helps place students in appropriate English and Mathematics courses. Lynn is married, with a family, and is beginning her 20th year at Columbia. Picture

**Lara Becker** (M.A., 1999) has been an English and Acting teacher since 1996 at John Hersey High School of Arlington Heights, IL. She is also the Arts Unlimited Coordinator and the Improvisation Club Sponsor.

**David Dahlman** (B.A., 2013) is a Corporate Alliances Sponsorship Fulfillment Coordinator at Six Flags Great America.

**Maria Gutierrez** (B.A., 2014) is a Career Advisor at Malcolm X College (City Colleges of Chicago). She is passionate and dedicated in assisting her students and alum meet their career aspirations by coaching and educating them throughout the job search process.

**Stacy Brill** (B.A., 2008; M.A., 2012) is pursuing a doctorate in Educational Leadership at DePaul University. She began The Stacy Brill Project to foster candid and transparent discussions to students and family members of all academic attainments about the benefits of a college education. After the completion of her doctoral studies, she plans to become a college professor, making sure to remain an educational advocate to those who need it most.

**Tony Craine** (B.A., 1989) is a strategic communications writer in the Marketing and Communications Department at University of Iowa Health Care. He is also a freelance voiceover talent featured in numerous TV and radio commercials, video narrations, and 19 audiobooks.

**Abby Lenz** (B.A., 2010) is a Senior Paralegal at Neal & McDevitt, a boutique intellectual property and marketing law firm in Northfield, Illinois. Abby's work focuses on trademarks, copyrights, and domain names. Abby also serves as Co-Chair for the Paralegal Committee for the Intellectual Property Law Association of Chicago and serves on the Trademark Administrators Committee for the International Trademark Association.

**Tim McMahon** (B.A., 2010) received an M.S. in Rehabilitation Counseling from Virginia Commonwealth University. Currently, he works at Northeastern Illinois University's Career Development Center advising students on all matters related to career development. He also builds partnerships with surrounding employers for the career advancement of NEIU students and alumni.

## 2015-16 Student Award Winners

**Brommel Hanson Ijams Hayward Scholarship**  
Krystyna Naryzhna

**Brommel Kramer Barnitz Scholarship**  
Denise Conrad

**Brommel Adams Bell-Jordan Scholarship**  
Mary Kroeck

**Brommel Denson Everson Snell Scholarship**  
Adewale Anifowose, Lacy Marlow

**Brommel Levy Staniec Scholarship**  
Nicole Leavey

**CMT Distinguished Student Award**  
Miguel Moreno, Philip Hasso, Adewale Anifowose,  
Joseph McCaffrey, Tasiana Villalobos, Denise Conrad

**Anna Antaramian Excellence in Theatre Award**  
Tyler Miles, Sean Ihnat, Mark Tacderas

**Communicating Sexualities Scholarship**  
Patricia Morales, Citlali Arroyo, Rolando Serna

If you value the accomplishments of and/or your experience with the CMT community, please consider a financial contribution to the Department. We appreciate ANY size donation, whether it is \$4, \$40, or \$400! For more information, visit [www.neiu.edu/giving](http://www.neiu.edu/giving). Also make sure to visit our webpage ([www.neiu.edu/cmt](http://www.neiu.edu/cmt)), like us on Facebook ([facebook.com/cmtneiu](https://facebook.com/cmtneiu)), and follow us on Twitter (@cmtneiu).