

# YORK

APRIL 2006

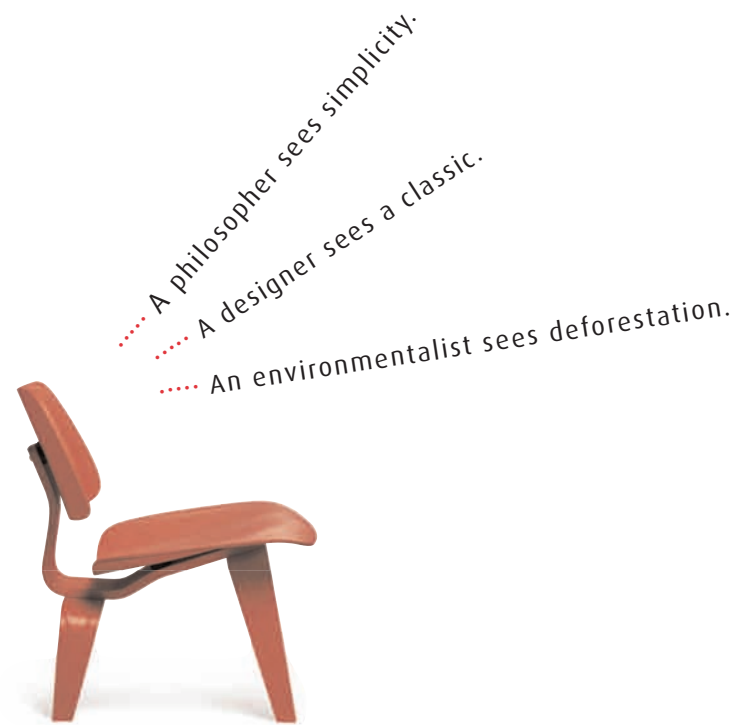
Starting a business  
while you're going to school

# YOUNG BUCKS

**PLUS**

Princess of Dance  
Ipperwash on Screen  
Wrangling Seals in Antarctica





**QUESTION EVERY ANGLE. STUDY EVERY ANGLE. RESEARCH EVERY ANGLE. WELCOME TO THE INTERDISCIPLINARY UNIVERSITY.** AT YORK, WE BREAK DOWN TRADITIONAL BOUNDARIES AND BRING TOGETHER THINKERS FROM EVERY DISCIPLINE TO TACKLE REAL-WORLD ISSUES. DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES CREATE A GREATER PERSPECTIVE. IN ADDITION TO INTERDISCIPLINARY PROGRAMS, STUDENTS CAN COMBINE MAJORS IN COMPLETELY DIFFERENT FIELDS. AT YORK, NOT ONLY CAN YOU STUDY INDUSTRIAL DESIGN, YOU CAN ALSO LEARN ABOUT ITS ENVIRONMENTAL REPERCUSSIONS. FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT THE INTERDISCIPLINARY UNIVERSITY, [VISIT YORKU.CA](http://VISIT.YORKU.CA).



**INSIDE**

**COVER PHOTOGRAPHY:**  
LINDSAY LOZON

# YORKU

THE MAGAZINE OF YORK UNIVERSITY

---

COVER

CAMPUS

FILM

EVENTS

STAGE

RESEARCH

**4 Editor@YorkU** Talking to the student press. BY BERTON WOODWARD

**7 Leading Edge** Balancing liberty and order. BY LORNA R. MARSDEN

**8 Universe**  
Up in the Air...What They're Reading...A Woodland Genie...Bough Wow...Class Comics...  
Classes that Click...Kwik Kwiz...Front Lines

**14 Young Bucks**  
Working hard for the money: how three Yorkies started businesses while going to school.  
BY MICHAEL TODD

**16 Positive Thinking**  
Prof and cross-dresser Michael Gilbert talks about sexual and gender diversity at York –  
and about his personal journey. BY MICHAEL TODD

**18 Ipperwash on Screen**  
In a new documentary, actress and film student Pamela Matthews traces her personal  
connections to the Ipperwash tragedy and the struggle for native justice. BY MARTHA TANCOCK

**20 Bright Lights**  
The City will be the theme of the 2006 Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences,  
York's biggest academic bash in years. BY MARTHA TANCOCK

**22 Princess of Dance**  
Yvonne Ng mines her bicultural heritage to create intense performances. BY MARTHA TANCOCK

**24 Wrangling Seals in Antarctica**  
How do you get tissue samples from an Antarctic seal? Just ask York molecular physiologist  
Thomas Hawke, who's been doing it. BY DAVID FULLER

**27 York People**  
Sculptor Dorsey James...Columnist and speaker Jill Andrew

**29 Back Talk**  
The joys of planning a conference of student journalists. BY CHRIS JAI CENTENO

APRIL 2006

Talking to the student press. BY BERTON WOODWARD

# Paper Trail

**E**ven after 30 years, it was a very familiar surrounding. Multitudes of sharp-eyed, casually dressed young people milling around in a downtown hotel, often with the lean and hungry look that truly does distinguish many journalists. This was the 68th national conference of Canadian University Press, the organization of student newspapers, which this year was hosted by *Excalibur*, York's student newspaper. York was also one of the sponsors. I was there to speak at the invitation of Chris Jai Centeno, editor of *Excalibur*, who had the unenviable task of organizing the conference – an exhausting effort he describes in this issue's Back Talk column on page 34.

Three decades earlier I had attended my first CUP conference at Acadia University in Wolfville, NS, as one of eight staffers from *The Ubyssy*, the student paper at the University of British Columbia. And thereby hangs a tale that I used to open my talk about design techniques ("What Magazines Can Tell Newspapers"). Our problem back then, as a group of student journalists on the left side of the continent, was how to get as many of us as possible to the far side as cheaply as possible. As managing editor, I discovered that the Canadian National Railway offered a very attractive "marriage discount" for wedded couples travelling together – and did not, an agent admitted, check for bona fides. Instantly eight of us paired up, and we self-anointed husbands and wives clambered aboard for five days of travel in coach class, largely upright, from Vancouver to Halifax in the middle of winter. Naturally



we fortified our baggage with a good many bottles, and we had a blast.

My point to my 2006 audience was how things have changed. Today, to do what we did by rail would cost a student paper a prohibitive \$10,800, minimum. I established this, I noted, via a quick check on the Internet, the entity that has most changed communications and publishing since my university days. Yet the look of student newspapers has not changed much in all that time, I told them; they still tend to be pretty grey. Daily newspapers have transformed themselves: big bold layouts, lots of interesting sidebar stories and graphics, high-impact pictures, opinion right up front – all techniques they stole from the newsmagazines I had long worked on.

Several students said their biggest problem in jazzing up their pages were the oppressive style guides they now had to deal with. Moreover, some despaired of convincing their colleagues that change was needed. Good gawd, I thought – Rules and Process had already descended upon these young editors when they could be at their most creative. Visually, at least, it turns out there are limits to what should be the freest press in the country. ■

Send letters, submissions, comments and ideas to editor@yorku.ca.

# YORKU

THE MAGAZINE OF YORK UNIVERSITY

VOLUME 3, NUMBER 4

**EDITOR** Berton Woodward  
bertonw@yorku.ca

**MANAGING EDITOR** Michael Todd  
mtodd@yorku.ca

**ART DIRECTOR** James Nixon  
jamien@yorku.ca

**STAFF WRITERS** David Fuller  
dfuller@yorku.ca

Martha Tancock  
mtancock@yorku.ca

**ASSOCIATE ART DIRECTOR** Cindy Wilce  
cindyv@yorku.ca

**COPY EDITOR** Marie Kopf  
mkopf@yorku.ca

**CONTRIBUTORS**

KC Armstrong, Chris Jai Centeno, Geoff George, Sophie Kinachtchouk, Jeff Kirk, Lindsay Lozon, Rsquared

YorkU is published bi-monthly, five times during the academic year, by the Marketing & Communications Division of York University. All issues circulate on York's campuses. The October, February and Summer editions are also sent to alumni, for a total circulation in those issues of 175,000 each.

**CHIEF MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER**  
Richard Fisher

**PUBLICATIONS DIRECTOR**  
Berton Woodward

**ADVERTISING**  
Tel: 416-736-5058  
E-mail: editor@yorku.ca

Publications Mail Agreement No. 40069546  
Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to:

Marketing & Communications Division  
West Office Building, York University  
4700 Keele Street  
Toronto, Ontario M3J 1P3  
Tel: 416-736-5979  
Fax: 416-736-5681

Ideas and opinions expressed in the articles do not necessarily reflect the ideas or opinions of the University or the editors.

ISSN 1708-4512

PRINTED IN CANADA



PHOTOGRAPHY BY HORST HERGET

A new policy calls on some old principles. BY LORNA R. MARSDEN

# Liberty and Order

**Y**ork University has a long history of association with members of the Supreme Court of Canada. Our current chancellor, Peter Cory, is a retired member of the Court. We have honoured several members with our degree. And in 1968, then York President Murray Ross invited soon-to-be justice (and later chief justice) Bora Laskin to chair a Presidential Committee on Rights and Responsibilities of Members of York University. The terms of reference for the governors, faculty and students on the committee included making "recommendations as to the norms that should govern the behaviour and activities of faculty and students". Laskin's report, published by the University of Toronto Press in 1970, provided the basis for the subsequent Presidential Regulations Governing Student Conduct and many of the other policies of the University, including the use



## The mandate was for all

of space on our campuses.

The report is worth reading 36 years later. It speaks to the freedoms which are essential to the aims of the University and states: "These freedoms can only be realized fully if the University is secure from external constraint, and if internally an environment is nourished which is free from upheaval and disruption and which is characterized by a mutual consideration, restraint, and tolerance among all its members so that the advantages of teaching, research, and study will be available to all to the extent to which they can or choose to benefit from them." The report goes on to say that "like any community the University must continuously resolve the problem of liberty and order." It is a thoughtful and thorough discussion of the issues.

This past year the University has again discussed the problems of liberty and order in the context of the review of York's Policy on the Temporary Use of University Space, established in 1993. A working group of faculty, students and staff has been meeting since April 2005 on a review of this policy, with a mandate to make the policy work in the contemporary situation

Lorna R. Marsden is York's president and vice-chancellor.

so that all recognized groups on campus can have access to our limited space but no classes or study are disrupted. The committee, which I chair, has listened to as many groups as came forward to the open forums, asked those departments and research units with particular uses to present their issues, and consulted

## recognized groups to have access to our limited space without disrupting studies.

about insurance, legal obligations, the constraints presented by transit operations, and the priorities of classroom use.

The report of this working group is being widely circulated, and it painstakingly outlines in the new policy a clear and transparent process for meeting the needs of the York community while protecting basic principles. In coming to its detailed conclusions, the working group was really drawing on the spirit and sometimes the letter of the Laskin report. In 2005-2006, just as in 1968-1969, our chief priority is to allow teaching, study and research to proceed without interruption, to allow full expression consistent with that and the laws of Canada, and to protect the academy from external constraint.

Not everyone will be satisfied with these conclusions. They will be reviewed again in a few years' time, no doubt. But in general we believe that the activities of all recognized clubs and associations can be accommodated without the disruption of classes, study or research and that the spirit of the academy can be protected and enhanced. ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY COREY MIHALIUK

# Up in the Air

Dominique Rabideau has started York's first juggling club

**F**or Dominique Rabideau, life is a constant balancing act – how to juggle her university assignments with, well, her love of juggling. The York fine arts undergrad is founder of the University's first juggling club (15 members so far), which meets Monday nights from 5 to 7pm throughout the academic year in the foyer of the Accolade West Building. “When you’re juggling, the best place is a gymnasium or outdoors, but the open space just inside Accolade is perfect for what we do. Nice high ceilings,” says Rabideau.

Almost everyone in Rabideau’s family (she has six brothers and sisters) juggles now, due to her influence. The only members who don’t are Mom and Dad and her smallest sister, who’s seven.

How good is Rabideau? So far she can juggle five balls/oranges/baguettes etc. at one time. That’s impressive, since juggling seven objects is considered black belt level in the juggling world. Aside from juggling, Rabideau is also interested in other circus arts. “I like to balance chairs on my chin. I also ride a unicycle,” she says.

Is there anything she doesn’t toss? “Chainsaws. They’re heavy and they hurt if you miss.” ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY KC ARMSTRONG



BOOKS

# What They're Reading

York people reveal what's on the bedside table

**Fiona Crean,**  
ombudsperson and director  
for human rights:

**Three Day Road**  
By Joseph Boyden

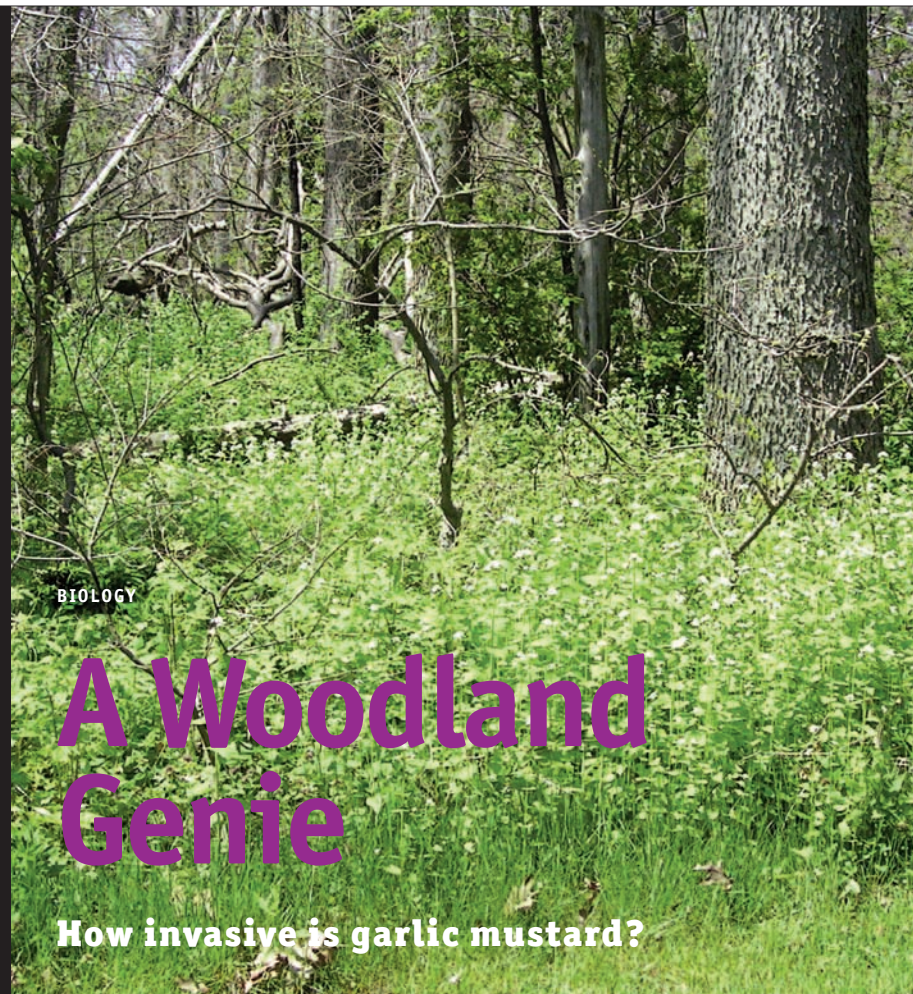
"I never have less than a dozen books next to my bed – lots of non-fiction and, depending on my mood, a good Minette Walters goes a long way! I've just finished two extraordinary books, both quite different. Joseph Boyden's *Three Day Road* is a riveting account of two Ojibwe friends who fought in the First World War as snipers. It is both brutal and inspiring. And I couldn't put down *Fear's Empire* by Benjamin R. Barber."

**Doug Crawford,**  
Canada Research Chair in  
Visuomotor Neuroscience:

**Rubicon**  
By Tom Holland

**Warriors of God**  
By James Reston, Jr.

"I keep a pile of books next to my bed to ward off insomnia. Lately I have relied on popular history as a good alternative to pulp fiction. *Rubicon* tells the classic story of Julius Caesar's rise to power, but puts this into the broader context of the events leading to the dissolution of the republic. *Warriors of God* is the best-written account I have read of the struggle between two great medieval leaders: Richard the Lion-hearted and Saladin. The relevance for current international politics was obvious."



BIOLOGY

## A Woodland Genie

### How invasive is garlic mustard?

**G**arlic mustard was originally brought to North America by pioneers for use as a herbal remedy. But like many imported plants, it didn't stay put and invaded woodlands, displacing native species. Some onlookers now say it poses a threat to native plants. York biology Professor Dawn Bazely, an expert on invasive species, isn't so sure.

Bazely bases her opinions on a long-term study she's been doing of garlic mustard's movements in Point Pelee National Park and Rondeau Provincial Park, both in Ontario. "About 28 per cent of Canadian flora are non-indigenous species [NIS] anyway," says Bazely. "So we're always interested in what their impact is on woodlands. While some NISs do alter ecosystem structure, most simply increase the species richness of an area. But predicting which introduced species might become a problem is a challenge."

Invasive species are only part of the picture. Human-disturbed ground affects native plants (cottages, roads etc.), and so does habitat fragmentation, climate change – and browsing wildlife. In Rondeau, she says, "at one point we found that where garlic mustard had invaded there was less species richness. But, over time, that trend reversed, following a major effort to reduce an exploding white-tailed deer population, which was eating all the rare and common native plants."

After four deer culls between 1994 and 2001, native plant recolonization was actually greater in areas where garlic mustard had been present for 10 years than in areas where it hadn't, she says. "Bottom line? It seems garlic mustard doesn't stop native species from coming back and repopulating an area." To Bazely, "invasive" is really a loaded word. Once plants have 'escaped', though, it's like trying to put the genie back in the bottle. ■

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF DAWN BAZELY

**T**he arrival of blossoms on York's relict apple trees (leftovers of the original campus's pioneer orchards) are a sure sign of spring. And now three new trees have joined their ranks, but these latecomers have very different pedigrees. Planted five years ago, they are direct descendants of Sir Isaac Newton's original apple tree in England, under which he sat in 1666 when (legend has it) he developed his theories about gravity.

Newton's woody descendants are planted in the quadrangle beside the Petrie Science & Engineering Building. One of the four-foot-high trees bore fruit for the first time last year. Biologist Michael Boyer, professor emeritus, Faculty of Science & Engineering, was responsible for bringing them to campus, a process that took him almost 10 years of negotiating due to government red tape and other setbacks such as Canada's extreme winters.

These are the first of Newton's trees to flourish in Canada, other than in research settings (some other descendants are found in the US). The tree is an old variety known as the Flower of Kent, which likely originated in France, says Boyer. "The fruit is small, about the size of a golf ball, but the trees should grow to a height of about 12 metres." With luck, one of Newton's progeny may one day prove fruitful in sparking a new scientific epiphany – for some York student fortunate enough to be lying in its shade. ■

# UNIVERSE



FLORA

## Bough Wow

Issac Newton's apple trees will soon be bursting into blossom

CULTURE

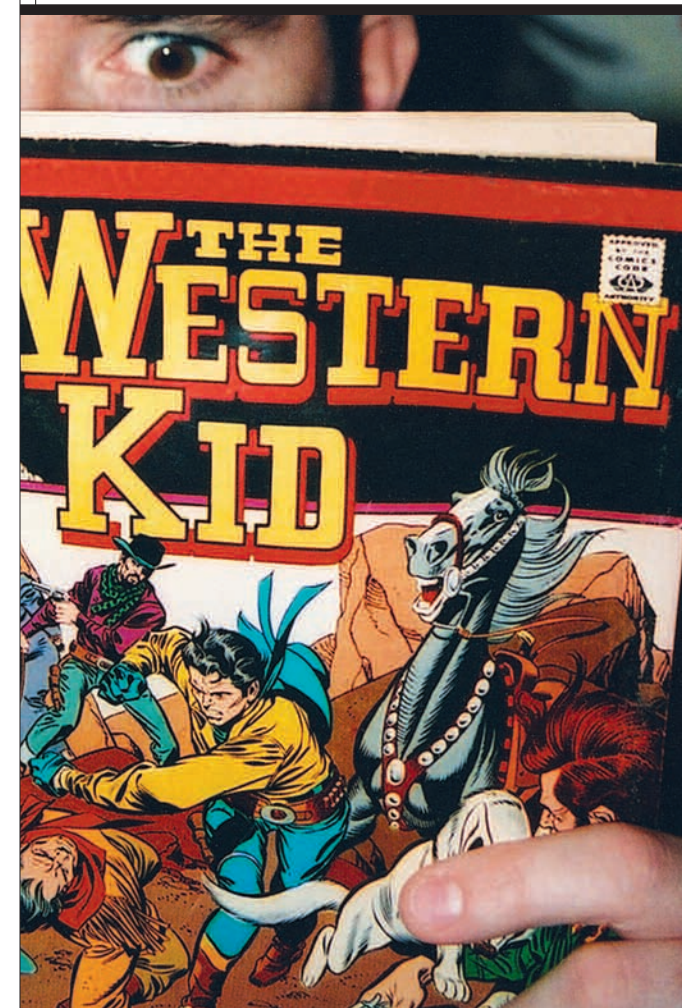
# Class Comics

Jonathan Warren teaches highly popular courses on 'toons

**J**onathan Warren, an expert on American novelist Henry James, now spends part of each week analyzing Spiderman and Betty Boop in front of eager undergrads. The York English professor teaches two hugely popular second-year courses on American comics and cartoons. "They might seem 'simple'," says Warren, "but comics are no less complex than other works. Pop culture artifacts are important barometers of their times. And they're vivid, gripping and fun."

Students seem to agree. His courses are always crammed. "I enroll about 130 people and probably turn away half that many each semester," says Warren. Never a comic freak himself ("When I was young, I rarely read them"), Warren, who's 40, lectures on both pre- and post-war comics and cartoons, ranging from their golden age (1900 to the Cold War) to the diverse existential/ironic modern era.

"Comics are a natural way into the weird workings of pop culture," he says. "They may get a bad rap as unworthy of serious attention, but students love them. And everyone gets a kick out of learning to see how jam-packed they are with meaning. Those little panels are a gold mine." ■



PHOTOGRAPHY BY RSQUARED

**S**oon raising your hand in class may become as quaint as the one-room schoolhouse – if raising a clicker catches on. In fact, in some York lecture halls, students are already doing just that. More accurately, they're aiming their "student response system" remote keypads at a receiver, which registers their responses to, say, a question posed by the prof, and which is then translated into instant class-wide feedback via video screen.

Clickers can be used to respond to questions in a lecture, or for impromptu class polls, or for tests. Similar to TV remotes, they work on the infrared spectrum as well as on radio waves. As part of a pilot project, three professors at York's Osgoode Hall Law School have been using them over the past year, including Dean Patrick Monahan, who is convinced of their benefits. "The beauty of using the clicker is that it encourages active rather than passive learning," he says.

Glendon psychology Professor Evelyne Corcos is also trying out the remotes, and says they're great because they increase the energy level of the class. "To be able to share your thoughts about exams and assignments is an empowering experience for students," says Corcos. "Clickers allow you to do that." ■

TECHNOLOGY

## Classes that Click



York is trying out hand-held devices that let students interact with their profs

BUILDINGS

## Kwik Kwiz

What's in a name? Plenty.

**N**ames of buildings may honour the past, acknowledge important individuals or reflect who's inside. And often, they change. Here are some "was then" and "is now" building names on the Keele campus to test your York savvy.

1. Then: Computer Science Building. Now?
2. Then: Parking Structure II Face Building. Now?
3. Then: Administrative Studies Building. Now?
4. Then: Parking Structure III Face Building. Now?
5. Then: New undergraduate residence. Now?



1. Computer Science & Engineering Building
2. William Small Centre
3. Health, Nursing & Environmental Studies Building
4. Student Services Centre
5. Pond Road Residence

Answers:



CONTACT

## Front Lines

Gwen Hickford and her colleagues are the voices of York

# UNIVERSE



**H**ello, this is Gwen speaking. How may I direct your call? Chances are, if you've phoned York within the last 33 years, that greeting sounds familiar. Those words are the salutation of Gwen Hickford (centre), the longest-serving of York's three telephone operators (that's Anne Marten on the left and Diane Paulin at right). Hickford has taken your calls since 1973. And there is a vast number now: the trio personally deal with an average of over 700,000 calls per month.

Many phone queries could be handled by the University's automated voice response system, of course, but, says Hickford,

"people will bypass it because they prefer talking to a human being." She doesn't mind. By now Hickford is an expert at directing almost any query to the right person. In fact, she rarely even needs to use a phone book. "I probably have a few hundred numbers memorized for sure," she says.

So does she ever get prank calls, like on April Fools Day? "Someone used to call every year and ask for 'Mr. Snicklehopper' – on the 10th floor of the Ross Building [which has only nine floors]. I'd always fall for it. But nobody does that anymore. I guess people have become too serious." ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SOPHIE KIMACHTCHOUK

CLICKER PHOTOGRAPHY BY RSQUARED



# Young Bucks

Working hard for the money: how three Yorkies started businesses while still going to school. BY MICHAEL TODD

PHOTOGRAPHY BY LINDSAY LOZON

## T

HERE'S NOTHING LIKE FORWARD-THINKING young entrepreneurs to get investors' blood racing, capital flowing and an economy booming – because sometimes what starts as an idea born in the family garage becomes the next big thing. While no one can predict whether the young entrepreneurs featured here – two of whom are current York students and one a recent grad – will become the Steve Jobs of the future, their stories give us a behind-the-scenes glimpse into the world of start-ups where you live or die by your creativity, street smarts and good old-fashioned hard work. All the while, you hope, trying to get some studying done.

## Todd Hustins

President & CEO of Five Star Experience  
Psychology student, Glendon

## W

HAT DO YOU GET for that special someone who seemingly has everything? Better yet, what do you get for people when you have no idea what they might like? Talk to Todd Hustins. The 22-year-old recently established a business – Five Star Experience (FSE) – devoted to matching the hard-to-buy-for with great gift ideas. But in FSE's case you get experiences, rather than things. "Things don't last a lifetime," says Hustins, who's doing his psych degree part time at Glendon, "but stories do, and I can guarantee that anyone who receives our life experiences packages will come away with stories. And that's what this is all about."

Hustins and his business partner, Joseph Lavoie, launched Five Star Experience last year. FSE now offers 31 "life experiences" that can include bungee jumping, ATV'ing, ultralight flying, rock climbing, power boating and whitewater rafting. But there are also calmer, "chill out" experiences such as golf packages, a spa massage, private art tours, cooking classes, a private yoga experience, pedicure and manicure, or a spa facial. Hustins and Lavoie have tested all of the experiences personally.

For \$200, recipients get to choose the experience they want, which helps avoid gifts that are unwanted, says Hustins. "It's a win-win situation for both giver and receiver," he says. "All experiences cost the same so it's really up to those receiving the gift to choose which ones they'll indulge in."

So far, the market-savvy students have broken down their experiences (which all take place either in or close to Toronto) into three consumer-friendly categories. So, for instance, there is the "Adrenaline" package (lots of adventure sports), the "Tranquility" category (think shiatsu massage or reiki therapy) and for those who love learning, the "Inspiration" niche (master sailing or Latin dance).

Hustins got the idea for FSE while travelling in Europe last year. His uncle in England was given an experience as a gift. "When I heard about that I thought it was a great idea, but why not give

people a choice from lots of possible experiences instead of just one? No one was doing that.”

As a bonus, FSE donates five per cent of the price of each package purchased online to one of five charities of the buyer's choice, such as the Canadian Cancer Society or Children's Aid Society. Even the buyer gets an experience.

## RoblehJama

Founder of Stylectroniq  
Psychology student, Faculty of Arts

**N**OT LONG AGO Robleh Jama, 23, was bored. Bored looking at all the white iPod earbuds stuck in people's heads. “I was on the subway and it suddenly struck me how boring it was seeing all these white wires coming out of everyone's ears – you know?” says Jama. “I thought, ‘Wouldn't it be cool to have those in a variety of hot colours?’ That way you could customize your iPod according to what you were wearing or your mood.”

Jama was onto something – recognizing a need. “I've always watched out for consumer trends,” he says. “I'm a people watcher and I keep tabs on marketing trends. I did an unpaid internship this past summer at the advertising firm Arnold Worldwide. It opened my eyes to the power of branding.”

Jama took his idea to a few friends – fellow York student Mustafa Darawal, York grad Fahd Akhtar from the Schulich School of Business (BBA '05), and graphic designer M. Hashi – who eventually became partners in the company he founded, Stylectroniq. Their product is a series of iPod-like earbuds called Stylec Earbuds (“ours definitely sound better than the official iPod product,” maintains Jama), which will be on the market this spring and will be competitively priced. The best part? “They'll come in colours other than white,” says Jama, who figures his target market is the 18-28 age group.

He plans to market his product mostly through trendy Queen Street West clothes boutiques where, he says, the kind of clientele likely to buy his product shop. “I was on the bus the other day wearing my prototype and this guy beside me had on his iPod buds. After a while he turned to me and asked where I got mine. I told him I made them and he was amazed and wanted to order some right away. So I knew I was doing something right.”

The buds will come in basic black and in colours that fashion cognoscenti are predicting will be hot this year: pink, green, orange and blue. Says Jama (who declined to be photographed for religious reasons), “It's hard balancing university and

starting your own business. But to me this doesn't really seem like work. When you're doing things for yourself, it's pleasure, not pain.”

## UrbanLee

Co-founder of PriceNetwork.ca  
BBA '05, Schulich

**B**ARELY OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL, Urban Lee was already busy researching ideas for his own start-up while in the process of enrolling in the Schulich bachelor program. Now he's a proud founder of PriceNetwork.ca (PN), a Web site that allows consumers to (ideally) save money by comparing prices on various kinds of merchandise among hundreds of stores online.

It's not a novel idea. Other sites like it exist in the US, but not in Canada, says Lee, whose business partners include fellow Schulich grad and friend Jimmy Yin (BBA '05), along with Terence Ho.

Lee doesn't know where he got the business gene exactly. “Certainly not from my parents,” he says. “My mother is a hairdresser and my dad teaches high school. I'm not sure where it came from but I can tell you when it came.”

PN was born of need and aggravation. Lee and some high-school buddies were busy building their own customized computers when they ran into a few glitches. “I'm cheap and I'm a good shopper, so of course I didn't have much money for all the electronics I needed to build my custom machine,” he says. “I remember my friends and I were running all over town, store to store, comparing prices and looking for the best deals. And prices would change daily so it was frustrating. I thought, ‘there must be a better way of doing this’.

“That's when I got the idea to start some kind of online business so people could comparison shop in an easy way,” says Lee. “The idea I came up with was the PriceNetwork. It's a win-win situation for vendors and consumers. Vendors get more exposure, but also compete more so consumers get better pricing and better service.”

In terms of start-up funding Lee didn't have a lot of money for staff or space. “We were students. So having a business that was Web-based made a lot of sense and it capitalized on our computer skills.

“My family wanted me to follow the traditional route. You know, study hard in math and science – maybe become an engineer. But I had been interested in business ever since high school. PN started out as a hobby really, and we hoped it might develop into a business. We made it!” ■





# Positive Thinking

Prof and cross-dresser Michael Gilbert talks about sexual and gender diversity at York – and about his own journey.

BY MICHAEL TODD

PHOTOGRAPHY BY GEOFF GEORGE



ANIMA STRENGTH: Gilbert as Miqqi Alicia

**S** EX IS BETWEEN YOUR LEGS, but gender is between your ears,” says Michael Gilbert, 60, York philosophy professor, husband, father and cross-dresser. Gilbert went public about his need to dress up periodically as a woman – and his transgenderism – just over a decade ago, and now he appears a few times a year *en femme* to teach his philosophy course. When “dressed” he is known as Miqqi Alicia. By and large his students are more than accepting. “Sure you get the odd person now and again who just doesn’t get it, but most people can make the switch and accept this other persona,” says Gilbert.

The York professor says he doesn’t really know *why* he likes to get dressed up as a woman, he just knows that he *does*. “For me it’s an expression of my feminine side, a declaration of my anima strength, and an awareness of how holistic we all truly are,” he says. “My acceptance of this part of myself, without shame or guilt, has taken a long time.”

Who belongs in the transgendered category? Anyone is considered to be TG if they aren’t thoroughly comfortable with their assigned gender identity, says Gilbert, Chair of SexGen York. “That would include transsexuals, cross-dressers, transgenderists, and gender outlaws of all stripes and inclinations,” he says.

SexGen York is responsible for addressing issues and concerns of sexual and gender diversity, whether in terms of University policy areas, academic climate or the general University environment. Gilbert has been involved with SexGen York since its inception, and he helped design and establish the PositiveSpace Program (PS supports the growth, freedom and expression of all members of the York community). He was also involved with the committee in the creation of the Sexuality Studies Program in the School of Women’s Studies.

Gilbert’s own transgender odyssey – from the *in camera* dressing that he enjoyed at home and in the privacy of his

family, to the more public, and possibly more judgmental, sphere of work – has, he says, been surprisingly smooth. But that isn’t always the case for others with gender issues. For any transgendered person, coming out about their real sexual self is a journey often fraught with uncertainty and fear. Gilbert himself cross-dressed for 38 years (he began at age 10) before he decided he needed to deal with the issue of that self he kept hidden in the closet.

## Finding Space



**YOU MAY HAVE SEEN** this logo adorning a person or group’s work space, office, dorm room etc. It’s given to those who have attended a SexGen York Positive Space workshop. The workshop familiarizes participants with the issues facing lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning people, and provides information concerning where and how resources for support can be obtained. If you would like to attend a workshop for yourself, or organize one for a group or unit, e-mail [sexgen@yorku.ca](mailto:sexgen@yorku.ca).

In a 1994 article for an online publication for cross-dressers and transsexuals, he charted some of his then-ambiguous feelings about publicizing his compulsion to dress: “In just a few hours I will have dinner with my wife and (most of) my children (ages 18-27) when I will be dressed with them for the first time (I have been dressed with my wife before). I am a 48-year-old cross-dresser who has

been well in the closet for all of my life. As I am not TS [transsexual], this has caused me pain, but has been bearable. Lately, though, it has become harder and harder. Various close friends know, and, as I learned, so do all of my children (five quite thoroughly blended from three marriages).”

Gilbert wrote further about the dilemma he felt – i.e. that he was hiding an important part of himself. “I don’t see what I do as harmful to anyone, and yet it is one of the last things which is not being protected by any major visible group. TVs [transvestites] are so much in the closet that we cannot even come out and defend ourselves. It is still politically correct to dump on TVs and TSs even by those, like some gay groups, who should know better,” he wrote in ’94.

Happily, Gilbert says that from his first day of being out at York, things couldn’t have been more accepting. “It was amazing,” he says. “I’m very lucky and grateful that we have the climate and tolerance we do at this University. It’s not like that everywhere – certainly not in the outside workplace or even at other universities. York has been a leader all along in the sex/gender areas,” says Gilbert.

“There are a lot of issues if you’re gender diverse on campus, such as gender-neutral washrooms and change-rooms, for example in Tait McKenzie. There are residence issues. For instance, maybe there’s a need for gender-neutral dorm floors. Or, if you have to share a room and you’re transgendered would you rather share it with a like person, or someone who would be comfortable with a TG person? You also have people in the York community in different stages of sex change – we need to look at where they’re supposed to change or what washroom to use.”

Now that there is a structure in place, says Gilbert, “we can address people’s concerns. I don’t think gender roles are easy for anyone these days, regardless of orientation. Maybe it’s time to abandon the concept of ‘men’ and ‘women’ and adopt masculine and feminine instead.” ■

In a new documentary, actress and film student Pamela Matthews traces her personal connections to the Ipperwash tragedy and the struggle for native justice.

BY MARTHA TANCOCK

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SOPHIE KINACHTCHOUK

**P**AMELA MATTHEWS MET DUDLEY GEORGE two days before he was shot and killed by an Ontario police sharpshooter during a native protest at Ipperwash Provincial Park in 1995. She had bumped into George by chance during a nostalgic trip to her childhood playground. But his death eclipsed those sunny memories and galvanized Matthews. Eleven years, a court case, a provincial inquiry and a TV drama later, the graduate film student has made a documentary of her personal connection to Ipperwash, now synonymous in Ontario with the struggle for native justice.

*A Shot in the Dark* begins with bucolic summers by Lake Huron and ends with the ongoing provincial inquiry into the fatal use of force against unarmed protesters at Ipperwash. Matthews, a veteran Canadian actress best known as Suzie Muskrat in "North of 60", is no stranger behind a camera. In 2002, her short film *Only the Devil Speaks Cree* scooped up top prizes at film festivals in Canada, the US and Australia. She enrolled at York to improve her credentials as a director and originally planned to produce a drama for her master's thesis. But Professor John Greyson urged her to document her more compelling Ipperwash story. The project has consumed her. "I can't let it go. It's too important," she says. Dudley George was the first person to die in a land claims dispute in the 20th century. "This was a turning point in aboriginal history. It was a major historical event."

Until Sept. 4, 1995, Matthews remembered Ipperwash as the army base where she spent summers playing with her sisters and brothers in the dunes while her father worked as the resident doctor for cadets-in-training. "We didn't have a clue in the world it was Indian land," says Matthews. Then, during a lazy end-of-summer drive in southern Ontario, she and a friend decided to visit Ipperwash. They'd heard radio reports of a native protest. Members of the Kettle and Stony Point First Nations had erected a barricade in the park next to Camp Ipperwash, frustrated by a half-century dispute over land the government had "borrowed" to train soldiers during the Second World War and never returned. Matthews, whose mother is Cree, paid close attention.

When they arrived, she and her friend stopped the car at the barricade and got out. "I was afraid to jump over. But my friend said, 'You're native. It's your land.' So we climbed over.

Boy, did I feel good that day. I thought, "This is my land." As they wandered down the beach, they came upon George and a few of his friends, who invited them to join them at a picnic table. For the next few hours, they chatted, aware that police watched them from helicopters and offshore boats. "Dudley was funny and fun-loving. He told bad jokes. I never got a sense of anger at all." Two days later, he was dead.

The following January, Matthews signed on as the legal assistant for Delia Opekokew, a lawyer hired by Sam George, Dudley's brother, to prosecute the Ontario Provincial Police for using unnecessary force in the death of his brother. "I was between gigs and I'd helped her with stuff before," says Matthews, who four years earlier had written a 90,000-word report on native theatre in Canada for the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. "And she knew I'd met Dudley."

The case came to trial 16 months later. On April 27, 1997, a judge pronounced acting OPP Sgt. Kenneth Deane guilty of criminal negligence causing death. "There was utter silence. The cops were stunned and the natives couldn't believe a cop had been found guilty. We had been prepped to hear 'not guilty'." Matthews let out a scream "so raw and loud [it] seemed to unleash something, because suddenly the courtroom was filled with sounds of natives sobbing with joy," wrote Peter Edward in his 2001 book *One Dead Indian*. The elation didn't last long, Matthews says. Deane was given 180 days community service with no jail time.

This January, CTV aired *One Dead Indian*, a drama based on Edward's book. Matthews played Dudley's sister Carolyn and relived that powerful moment. "I got the part without an audition," she says. The director wanted authenticity and got it by asking her to share her recollection of that day with fellow actors. "This is the best thing that's ever come my way because it's so close to me and very, very important."

*A Shot in the Dark* is even closer to Matthews. The filmmaker's personal journey through Ipperwash didn't end with *One Dead Indian* but includes footage from the ongoing provincial inquiry into how the OPP handled the 1995 standoff. "This is where the truth is coming out." She's already begun entering the 45-minute documentary in film festivals, determined to "let people know the truth." As a native artist who intends to continue telling native stories, "I want *A Shot in the Dark* to build understanding." ■

# A Shot in the Park

The City will be the theme of 'Congress', York's biggest academic bash in years.

BY MARTHA TANCOCK

PHOTOGRAPHY BY GEOFF GEORGE

# Bright Lights

**G**ET READY FOR COMPANY. For eight days this spring, 8,000 scholars and researchers from across Canada and around the world will converge upon York's Keele campus to talk about The City, the theme of the 2006 Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences. Not since 1969, when the campus was a solitary outpost in the barrens of north Toronto, have members of this country's 80 academic societies come together at York. "What an incredible opportunity to show the University's coming of age," says John Lennox, Congress Chair and academic convener at York. And what an incredible opportunity to show how innovative York can be when it comes to organizing these academic Olympics. "We've raised the bar," says logistics convener Deborah Hahn.

This year's urban theme would have been entirely unsuited to the York of 37 years ago, but it's perfectly fitting now. From a cluster of buildings "in the middle of nowhere," York has grown to become Canada's third-largest university, the dynamic intellectual and cultural hub of the Greater Toronto Area – a city within a city. "We are a pre-eminently urban university and that is why the Congress theme – The City: A Festival of Knowledge – is quintessentially York," says Lennox.

This is the 75th anniversary of Congress (formerly known as the Learned's) and York and the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences have lined up some stellar intellectual and artistic talent for the May 27-June 3 assemblage. "Congress will be a festival of knowledge and a celebration of York," says Lennox.

Bernard Shapiro, Canada's first independent ethics commissioner, will give the keynote address at the anniversary gala. Stephen Lewis, UN special envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa, and environmentalist David Suzuki will give lectures. Award-winning Canadian novelists Nicole Brossard and Eden Robinson will speak at special breakfast events. York President & Vice-Chancellor Lorna R. Marsden will host an international panel of university presidents discussing the university as urban institution.

For entertainment, delegates will be treated to some of York's faculty stars. Concert pianist Christina Petrowska, jazz saxophonist David Mott, jazz quartette Time Warp, Mark Chambers and the York Baroque Ensemble, and mezzo-soprano Catherine Robbin will give the opening concert in the new Accolade East recital hall. Other ensembles will perform in the hospitality tent and other venues. There will be a mini film festival on the city theme, a photography exhibit in the new art gallery, plus dance and theatre.

Special events aside, delegates may notice that host York is running the whole show a bit differently. York is the first to create a gallery showcasing humanities and social science research at the University. On the second floor of York Lanes, delegates can browse among posters highlighting York's city-themed research and talk to those involved. "Congress is the biggest event we have in Canada of the social sciences and humanities," says Engin Isin, Canada Research Chair in Citizenship Studies who has helped organize York's academic program. "The research gallery is not just a showcase but a catalyst for interdisciplinary, collaborative and innovative research. It's a chance to see ourselves in a new light."

York has broken with tradition, too, when it comes to logistics. "We're the first to have online bookings for meeting rooms, audiovisual equipment and catering," says Hahn. Not only is this more convenient for those attending, it is a boon to organizers. Congress is the biggest and most logistically complex project the Hospitality York senior manager has ever faced. "It's anticipated that on any given day during any given time slot there could be 200 different society meetings scheduled," says Hahn. "Each meeting requires coordinating technical support and catering." Luckily, classes will be rescheduled to make room for the meetings.

For months, Hahn and project manager Cindy Bettcher have negotiated other meaningful changes. The giant book fair won't be in the gym but in York Lanes mall closer to Vari Hall, the Congress hub. For the first time, this Congress is going "green". For instance, delegates will receive reusable travel mugs for hot and cold drinks, to minimize paper waste, and York caterers will serve Las Nubes fair trade coffee. This year, Hahn and Bettcher have contracted a Somali women and children's support network in Toronto instead of an overseas supplier to make conference tote bags. "This also fits with the city theme," says Bettcher, director of York's continuing education division. "And it's one of the ways we can contribute to building capacity within our own community. York is living up to its motto: Redefine the possible."

Like Hahn and Bettcher and their teams, hundreds of faculty and staff will put in untold hours – while they continue to do their day jobs – to pull off this giant event. "In some way, everybody who works at York is involved," says Hahn, who plans to hire 100 students to help during the event. "We're relying on the entire York community to be ambassadors for the University." Adds Lennox: "This campus will shine." ■

**Y**VONNE NG IS ONE JUMBO SHRIMP. Only 4'10", she's regarded as a giant by many in Toronto's contemporary dance world. Dancer, choreographer, teacher, filmmaker and impresario, she has had a career that would have been inconceivable had she returned to her native Singapore after graduating from York in 1987 with a BFA. But she didn't. Now, nearly 20 years later, Ng has a reputation as "one of the city's most expressive and intense dancers," according to *Now* magazine. She's a choreographer's dream. She's also a choreographer whose bicultural East-West esthetic and striking imagery has won acclaim in Canada and Singapore.

In late March, the York Dance Ensemble will perform one of her works during the week-long Fine Arts Festival inaugurating The Accolade Project, the brand new complex housing major new theatre, music and dance facilities at York. The piece is one of several commissioned works by dance alumni to be presented on the new proscenium stage. "I'm very honoured and thrilled because York played an important role during part of my life," says Ng. "It's about time all the different fine arts disciplines came under the same roof and shared with each other."

Artistic collaboration is a hallmark of Ng's Tiger Princess Dance Projects. Since 1995, she has worked with choreographers, composers, musicians, and lighting, set and costume designers to produce shows acclaimed at home and abroad. She likes to experiment, to blend vocals, live music, sculpture and text with movement. Lately, she has veered into structural improvisation, where dancers improvise on a theme based on a repertoire of movements they've rehearsed. "I like making art. Not just pure dance – art."

For York's Fine Arts Festival, Ng is creating a 10-minute haiku of *Signs*, two 30-minute pieces that debuted in February at Toronto's Harbourfront Centre. Like *Signs*, the shorter work will be autobiographical, focusing on her Catholic upbringing and her idolization of a girl who later bullied her. Ng typically mines her personal experience to express universal themes. She looks for the perfect symbol. "As a choreographer my challenge is, can I find images that are striking or distinct enough to imprint in your memory, like the image in a film?"

Ng's childhood is still a rich source of inspiration. Born and raised in Singapore, Ng watched Chinese opera, Indian cinema and 1940s and '50s Hollywood films as a child. She studied traditional ballet and dreamed of being a ballerina, even though, her parents pointed out, she was too short. Concerned she would be condemned to a life of poverty, her father refused to pay for further dance studies after she graduated from secondary school. Dance was a hobby, not a career. He would agree, however, to pay for more practical studies in hotel and catering management at the University of Guelph. Not until she was halfway through her first year did she muster the courage to tell him she'd auditioned – "What did I have to lose?" – been accepted and enrolled in York's dance program instead. "I didn't tell my parents for the longest time. I was afraid I would be disowned." Months of silence ensued until one day her father phoned. "He said he would rather see me happy and poor in Canada than unhappy and poor in Singapore. I was stunned."

Independent, released from familial duty, Ng poured her heart into dancing – and has reaped the rewards. Since 2000, she has won a Dora Mavor Moore Award for her performance in *BITE*, the K.M. Hunter Dance Award, two Chalmers awards and a New Pioneers Arts Award.

Toronto remains her home and its dance community, her surrogate family. In demand as a dancer and choreographer, she's produced films, served on boards of dance organizations and founded a studio co-op. She also curates the national festival *Dance: made in canada/faït au canada*, and the annual performance workshop *Series 8:08*. "I think I learned from an early point in my career that you don't have to dance 24/7 to still be involved in the dance community."

"It's still hard to make a living as a dancer," says Ng, but she persists "because I love it, I love creativity." With every project she learns something different, moves in a new direction. "I'm still making my own way, trying to find my own place." Still of two worlds, Ng believes "coming to Canada has given me a greater sense of options in my life. I don't know what brought me here but it was and still is the right place." ■

**SEE THE FINE ARTS FESTIVAL,  
MARCH 20-26**

An Yvonne Ng work will be part of celebrations inaugurating The Accolade Project, York's new teaching, exhibition and performance complex. There will be concerts in the new recital hall, alumni films in the new cinema, tours of the spacious new art gallery, modern dance on the new proscenium stage. Visit [www.yorku.ca/finearts/festival](http://www.yorku.ca/finearts/festival) to find out more.

Yvonne Ng mines her bicultural heritage to create intense and striking dance performances. BY MARTHA TANCOCK

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SOPHIE KINACHTCHOUK

# Tiger Princess



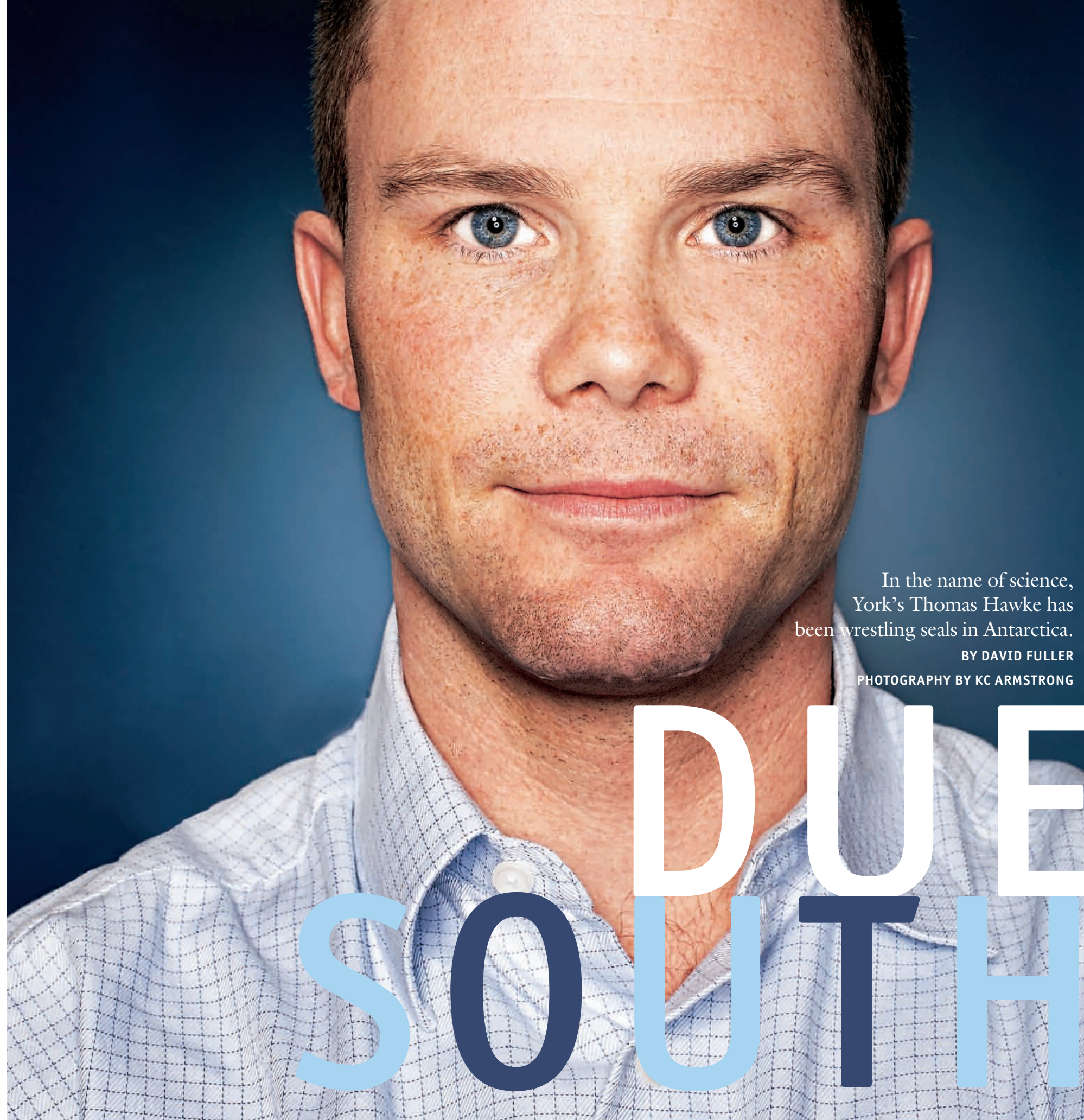
P

**ICTURE THE MOLECULAR PHYSIOLOGIST:** a lonely, white-coated figure bent over a microscope, toiling with the minutiae of fleshy solutions in his dimly lit basement lab. Routine? Now, place him in a blazing red parka and jazzy sunglasses speeding across Antarctica's stunning frozen landscape on a snowmobile. Or, view his youthful face on the Internet, grinning in an explorer's makeshift digs a few hundred kilometres from the South Pole, answering challenging questions from high-school students at the opposite end of the world.

Put these images together and you've got a good composite picture of Thomas Hawke, professor in York's School of Kinesiology & Health Science, and his anything-but-routine job as a stem-cell biologist. And that's exactly how Hawke, a former professional lacrosse player and avid runner who specializes in muscle biology, likes it: serious science to challenge the mind and enough physical work to keep in shape. In fact, a shortage of challenge almost ended his career before it started when he considered dropping out of undergraduate studies at the University of Guelph. "If not for lacrosse, I probably would have dropped out," he says. But when he reached his final year at Guelph, he met a faculty member who was studying muscle biology and found the spark that ignited his smouldering sense of curiosity.

That interest in the science of physical activity led Hawke to explore the mysteries of muscles and made him a perfect candidate to join the team of Project B-018-M, a nine-week expedition that began last October to study the amazing Weddell seals of Antarctica, organized by researchers from the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas. He was invited to join his three American colleagues on the trip because of his expertise in muscle stem cells. Being fit enough to wrangle seals as he took samples from them or to dig out snowbound storage huts was also a factor. It helped, too, that he had worked with team leader Shane Kanatous during three years of post-doctoral research at UT Southwestern. "That was a big thing for Shane, making sure everyone could get along," Hawke explains. "We were going to be together in small living areas and there was no place to go to get away from people." In his award-winning project Web site, [www.polarscience.ca](http://www.polarscience.ca), which he maintained with help from Canadian science outreach organization Yes I Can!, Hawke described meeting fellow researchers Steve Trumble and Rebecca Watson and the sense of relief when they realized their shared interests and backgrounds would make for a harmonious sojourn.

But the trip wasn't without its concerns for one of York's newest professors, who joined the Faculty of Science & Engineering in 2003. As if his professional bonds weren't enough to



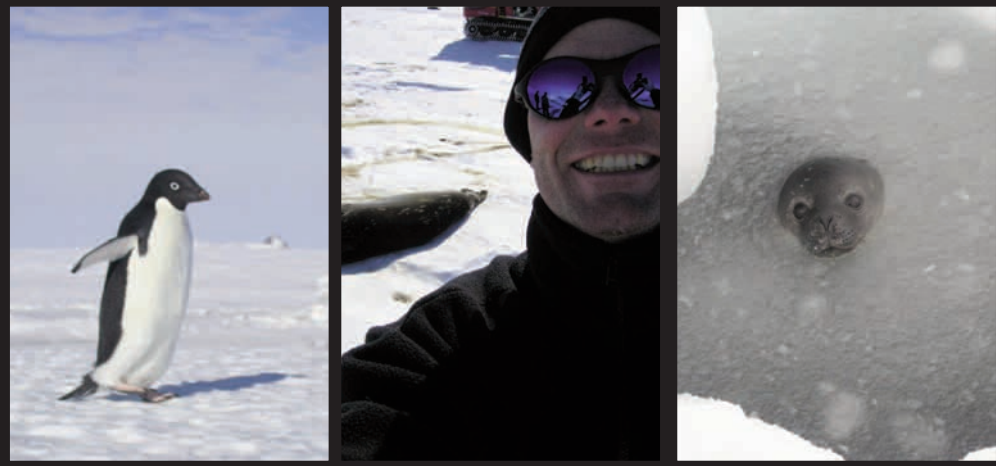
In the name of science, York's Thomas Hawke has been wrestling seals in Antarctica.

BY DAVID FULLER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY KC ARMSTRONG

SOUTH

## RESEARCH



**ICE AGE:** Scenes from the team's Antarctic visit – that's Hawke behind the sunglasses

think about, Hawke was also leaving Beth, his wife of six weeks, for the second extended period in their six-year relationship. The couple were also apart during her years studying in Toronto while Hawke worked in Dallas. "A long-distance relationship we were used to but it was still tough," he said. "We have a running joke between us: How can I miss you if you won't go away?" But the chance to travel to Antarctica to study the Weddell seal with its amazing ability to deep dive for long periods without coming up for air – a trait that has important implications for potential heart disease therapies – was too good to pass up.

The team's journey began with an 11-and-a-half-hour flight from Los Angeles to Auckland, New Zealand, followed by an hour's hop to Christchurch. There, team members boarded a US Air Force C17 jet for a five-hour flight 3,500 km due-south to McMurdo Station, located on the volcanic rock of Ross Island. On arrival, team members immediately started a week of training, learning how to live and work in the coldest region on the planet: everything from riding a snowmobile and studying the weather to radio communications and waste disposal. (For environmental protection, nothing – not even human waste – is left behind in Antarctica.)

For Hawke, who was making his first trip to this extreme climate, the training included a special initiation dubbed "Happy Camper School", an overnight survival test where rookies are given only a small field bag with the bare essentials: tents, some tools, a single-burner camp stove, water and dehydrated food. His group of fellow first-timers had to set up camp in a howling "Condition 2" storm with wind speeds of up to 102 kilometres an hour, wind chills of between -59 C and -73 C and visibility of less than 400 metres. And it was summer in the Antarctic. As if to underline the vagaries of conditions in this inhospitable land, the storm ended once they had pitched their tents, leaving the rookies with little to do but gaze at a stunning Antarctic sunset.

Weddell seals, the object of all their preparation, live happily in this environment and, in order to find them, team members had to travel an hour from camp in a clumsy vehicle called a Pisten Bully to holes in the sea ice where these amazing creatures come up for air. It was here that team members' physical fitness came into play. As one researcher gently wrestled a seal to hold it still, others took samples of muscle tissue using needles and bare hands – all the while observing standards of care for the animals' safety required by project sponsors, the National Science Foundation. Once collected, the tissue samples were packed onto a snowmobile and rushed back to camp by Hawke, who would then spend several hours processing them while the rest of the team made their way back in the much slower Pisten Bully.

The samples are critical to the project's two streams of research on Weddell seals and their remarkable ability to adapt to their environment. Hawke's work is focused on stem cells and their role in growth and regeneration of the Weddell's muscles with their unique properties. Team leader Kanatous is interested in a particular protein within the seals' muscles that helps with oxygen transfer and allows these land-based mammals to stay submerged for as long as 87 minutes. Both investigations are aimed at understanding how muscles – particularly human heart muscles – might be repaired after damage from heart disease. One potential therapy, mentioned in a newspaper clipping on Hawke's bulletin board, involves injecting stem cells into the heart to strengthen it. The still experimental procedure was performed in Thailand late last year on the ailing Hawaiian crooner Don Ho, who then resumed performing at age 75.

As he talks about stem cells and the different theories about their therapeutic potential, Hawke reveals the intense, inquisitive nature that is the stock-in-trade of all researchers. His experience on the Antarctic ice shelf, he says, has given him new research material for his lab – and renewed inspiration to delve deeper into the mysteries of physical life. ■

# YORK PEOPLE

IT WAS A BLEAK LITTLE PARK few ever visited. Until York-trained sculptor Dorsey James (BFA, BEd '76) arranged recycled hydro poles in a Stonehenge-like circle on a hill overlooking Lake Ontario. Called Home Place, it's a point of pride – and spiritual sanctuary – for Pickering locals. They are drawn by the towering portal on the hill, by mythical creatures James has chiselled into dead tree trunks in the forest, and by Kijimba Kind – his phrase for spirit children – 10 carved poles along a waterfront trail depicting immigrant stories. "In my neighbourhood, people come from all over the world. I wanted to make something that reflected the diversity I know." James, an ex-US Air Force fighter-bomber mechanic raised in the Philadelphia ghetto, is part of that Canadian mix. Home Place is the 60-year-old retired art teacher's biggest project since falling in love with wood in York's studios 30 years ago. "Carving Kijimba Kind enables me to meld my story with that of nation and nature." ■



**Dorsey James**  
Sculptor

## Spirit Carver

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFF KIRK

**Jill Andrew**  
Newspaper columnist

# Budding Oprah

**JILL ANDREW.** Recognize the name? Not yet, perhaps. Currently she writes the "Ask Jill" column in Toronto's free daily *Metro*, named best column in 2005 by the Canadian Ethnic Journalists & Writers Club. This is "fabulous" – her favourite word – because the 27-year-old freelance journalist is building personal brand recognition as she prepares to produce sample interviews for her own TV talk show, then shop it around. The director of her own public relations company, JAM (short for Jill Andrew Media), she also does good works that raise her community profile, such as giving inspirational talks to women and youth groups and organizing charity events. Andrew meant to teach after earning sociology, theatre and education degrees part-time at York, but journalism has enthralled her ever since she pretended a spoon was a mike and "interviewed" her mother's friends. "I want to have a voice and help others discover theirs," she says. "I want to be the inspiration for that little kid who was bullied like I was into thinking she didn't have the right to dream." ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY GEOFF GEORGE



The joys of planning a major journalism conference. BY CHRIS JAI CENTENO

# My Biggest Deadline

**A**UTHOR AND JOURNALIST Jan Wong summed it up best when she said, "Poor you. Dealing with a bunch of reporters is like trying to herd goldfish." She was referring to poor me, organizing "Spin 2006", a.k.a. Nash, a national student journalism conference hosted by Excalibur, York's student newspaper, and Canadian University Press (CUP), which links all the country's student papers. There I was, trying to book and confirm speakers for what was supposed to be the biggest conference in CUP's 68 years, when all of a sudden a federal election was called.

**Jan Wong has been called 'the Hannibal Lecter of the lunch set'. She exuded everything but that.**

Every year, the national conference travels to a different city and province. Last year, *Excalibur* won a bid to host Nash for January 2006 in Toronto. In *Excalibur's* almost 40-year existence, we had never hosted the big conference. So we truly didn't know what we were in for.

The early planning stages started in May of last year. My first task was finding a conference space big enough to hold 350 student journalists from across Canada, for a week. It was surprising that in a city as big as Toronto, only three or four downtown hotels could hold this capacity. Luckily, we found our space at the Holiday Inn on King Street.

The next thing on my to-do list was booking speakers. Being in Toronto – Canada's media capital – we had a huge pool of high-calibre journalists and editors to choose from. But when the minority Liberal government fell and a January election loomed, panellists dropped out like escaping goldfish. We scrambled to replace them with only weeks left.

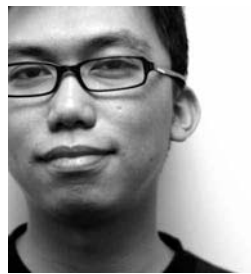
The closer we came to the event, the more anxious and exhausted I became. We had an army of 12 staff, but there were at least a hundred things to do and so little time. On the first day of the conference, I was constantly on guard, trying hard not to panic in case any – or every – little detail went wrong.

In the end, nothing serious did go awry, but there were bumps. What do you get when you have 350 young people in partying mood in a hotel for several nights? Problems with hotel security. For a while we were facing potential financial penalties.

Chris Jai Centeno is editor of *Excalibur*.

Happily, it was all resolved and I can laugh about it now, but it was no laughing matter then.

Although I was a zombie during the conference, I managed to have many memorable moments. Jan Wong, an idol of mine, was a crowd favourite. She blended in, wearing jeans with a bright-coloured backpack, looking very collegiate. She has a media persona that can be described as mean-spirited and catty, and former broad-



caster Pamela Wallin once called her "the Hannibal Lecter of the lunch set", referring to her now departed column for *The Globe and Mail*, "Lunch With...". Wong exuded everything but that.

"There are no stupid questions," she said to the wide-eyed crowd, referring to her articles where she asked unscripted, unrestrained questions of acclaimed individuals. The veteran reporter then told a story of a surprising discovery she made about Margaret Atwood. Wong was a little annoyed with the author for not ordering anything, especially since the interview was taking place at a restaurant. Out of the blue Wong suddenly asked her if she could spell. The Booker Prize winner disclosed that when she was growing up, her mother told her she couldn't be a writer because she couldn't spell. The young Atwood snapped back: "Others will do that for me." And so began one of Wong's famed columns.

Another former editor and *Globe* columnist, Heather Mallick, brought inspiration to the cynicism often encountered in the press. She lit up everyone's faces when she shared the truth about her career as a columnist, her triumphant struggle facing sexism in the early stages of her career, and her sudden resignation from the *Globe* on a point of journalistic principle.

Organizing Spin 2006 was a learning experience but it also felt like I was throwing a week-long family get-together where I hadn't met anyone. The camaraderie among the delegates was instantaneous: we all shared the same passion for student journalism. After seeing the conference get into full swing, I finally unwound and took part in many a toast in, of course, true journalistic fashion. ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOYCE WONG