

Now's the time, journalism entrepreneurs

Hayes Ferguson, KWF '99, delivered the 26th Graham Hovey Lecture on Sept. 15, 2011, a spectacular fall day at the Wallace House. Ferguson is chief operating officer of Legacy.com Inc., the world's largest online obituary and memorial site with more than 800 newspaper partners around the world. It is among the 100 most visited domains on the Internet. Her address, "Access to Obits: Building Legacy.com," can be found at kwfellows.org. We followed up the lecture with a few questions.

► How did your time in the fellowship help shape your views on your career going forward?

It made me realize that there were lots of ways to have an interesting, meaningful career.

► You basically discovered the digital world during your fellowship. Was there a "wow" moment when you saw how the Internet could change journalism?

It was pretty cool to be able to browse through photos of the Lake Michigan cottage I ended up buying—and to get all sorts of other details about the place—before I ever set foot in it. As I said in my talk, what's the norm today was pretty amazing back then.

► Everyone's talking about collaboration in journalism these days. Meanwhile, Legacy.com seems to have come up with a model that's beneficial to all its partners. What's your take on journalistic collaboration?

Without our newspaper partners, we wouldn't have been as successful as we've been. At the same time, we believe we help newspapers,

which invariably see a spike in traffic in their obit sections, among other benefits, when they partner with us.

► Beyond the subject matter, there are other reasons that Legacy.com has carved out such a successful niche. Can you touch on some of the key management decisions that made your site a phenomenon?

We've remained dedicated to newspapers, even as "experts" have told us it was unwise to be so closely tied to a struggling industry. We continue to believe that newspapers will be around for a long time, in some form or another.

► How will Legacy.com remain viable in the ever-changing world of the Internet?

The key for us is to continue leveraging technology as it evolves. Facebook, for example, is a great tool for Legacy.com and our newspaper partners because it allows us to share obituaries with an audience that might otherwise

not see them. We recently launched a cool app, MyMemorials, that allows Facebook users to essentially create a virtual wall (to use a Facebook term) with obituaries and guest books for people who were important to them. The app, along with other features we've implemented on behalf of our newspaper partners, have resulted in more than 2 million monthly referrals from Facebook to newspaper obituaries. That's a staggering figure, considering that it was zero a few years ago

► What advice would you give aspiring journalism entrepreneurs? *Never before has there been such a great environment for journalism entrepreneurs—so go for it! ■*



Hayes Ferguson, CEO of Legacy.com, the world's largest aggregator of obituaries.

From the Head Fellow

— By Charles R. Eisendrath '75

CHANGING WITHOUT CHANGE

With the journalistic world turned upside down, who applies to KWF these days? The same people as always, but that's the only similarity. Let me explain ...

The rules haven't changed; journalism must be their primary source of earnings and they must have a minimum of five years professional experience. These standards were set in 1973, when the National Endowment for the Humanities first funded a program then called Journalists in Residence, and they are still the only requirements.

You never had to be employed anywhere. Until the past few years, however, virtually everyone was. The reasons were a straightforward mix of demographics and politics. The overwhelming majority of journalists were employees and so, too, were applicants. But that's not where it ended. The program itself felt obligated to help train staff members from the news organizations that had helped create and support the fellowships. When KWF's \$50 million endowment drive went into high gear in the late 1980s, the feeling of obligation intensified.

And then a funny thing happened. While KWF's ambitions steadily grew to include full endowment status and an intercontinental travel program, its funding base in traditional news organizations and their associated foundations atrophied and then died. Other individuals and organizations, some of them unrelated to journalism, contributed in order to improve the quality of journalism of most concern to them, such as sports and transportation technology.

The same thing was happening in how news organizations supported fellowship applicants, themselves. For the first 15 years of journalism fellowships at

Michigan, companies continued their employees' health insurance and often made up the difference between their salaries and the stipend paid by the program, which was nearly always lower, often dramatically so. Then came the tsunami that washed away much of quality journalism in America. Also swept away were many salary/stipend equalization payments to



employees talented enough to win fellowships. Health insurance support soon followed. After 2000, the number of news organizations supporting their own applicants in any way plummeted.

KWF responded by adding health and travel insurance and steadily raising the stipend to \$70,000, or \$8,750 monthly, the equivalent of a full year's salary at \$105,000. The differential has shrunk and for many, disappeared.

Over time, the program's expressed message to fellows has also changed, from "Congratulations on what you've done" to "You're here because of what we think you're capable of doing *after* a fellowship."

Part of the orientation for newcomers is the news that the program sees them not as beneficiaries of largesse, but as investments; human growth stocks in whom the program is investing heavily. Their

understanding of this concept means there is less quibbling about meeting program requirements such as attending all events, not working professionally (blogging included) and, for specialized reporting fellowships, tailoring classes to donor stipulations.

This immediate understanding from the fellows contrasts with what we've experienced from news organizations. In recent years they have been so focused on cutting back that the idea of cutting someone *loose* for a year seems unaffordable at any price, for any benefit less immediate than the next quarterly report.

Unable to persuade some companies to accept help directly, KWF relies on relentless service to its ultimate beneficiaries, namely the audiences for news. That's not as complicated, indirect or theoretical as it might sound. Until the *industry* of journalism teetered and then collapsed (as opposed to the *profession*, which remained vital), KWF accepted no more than one freelancer a year, on the theory of serving the institutions that created and maintained the program. This year's class of 12 Americans has four times as many, and we expect the trend to continue.

This apparent dramatic change disappears, however, when you look at whom this explosively expanded category of fellows serves. It is, of course, the same people the fellowships have always benefited: the news audiences of America, through some of the same traditional news organizations of the country. This year these included *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Los Angeles Times*, *People* and *Sports Illustrated*.

Everything has changed, in short, except the program, the fellows and the ultimate beneficiaries.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Charles R. Eisendrath". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

FELLOWSHIP LEADS TO MOTORCYCLE SPEED RECORD

— By Kevin Clemens '08

Last summer I set a national land speed record at the Bonneville Salt Flats in Utah, riding an electrically powered motorcycle that I built in my home workshop in Minnesota. My two-way average speed of 61.538 mph established a new mark for the 150-kilogram unstreamlined electric category, but more importantly it served to demonstrate that electric vehicles of the future need not be slow and boring.

The idea to build an electric motorcycle with which to compete at Bonneville came to me as a direct result of my 2007–08 Knight Wallace experience. As one of the few automotive journalists who have ever gone through the program, I focused on researching and writing a book, “The Crooked Mile,” that examines energy and infrastructure in our transportation future.

After my year in Ann Arbor, I found it difficult to go back to writing about overpowered and overpriced vehicles and started writing about environmental topics. Eventually, I took the necessary classes to be awarded a master’s degree in environmental education from Hamline University in St. Paul, MN. Having spent much of my life racing vintage sports cars, I still felt the “need for speed” and decided to put my money where my newfound environmental mouth was by taking an electric motorcycle to Bonneville for a record attempt.

The motorcycle itself started out life as a 1970s Honda Scrambler. Most of the components, like the motor, the controller and the battery circuitry, are off the shelf—knowing how difficult it is to set a land speed record, I wanted to make a machine that was as simple and reliable as possible. The proof was the trouble-free record runs that I enjoyed in the 107-degree heat of the salt flats.

The record run has generated lots of attention and seems to capture people’s interest. So much so that I have formed a company (www.thevelocityworkshop.com) to promote electrification of transportation through performance designs. In addition, I have been accepted by the University of Minnesota Department of Education’s Ph.D. program to research how education and curriculum influ-

ence the understanding of new technologies.

Having accomplished what I set out to do was great, but now the salt is in my blood and I am building a faster bike to take to Bonneville this year. My goal of 100 mph is ambitious for a motorcycle in the 150-kg class, but the real goal is to use motorsports and my modest efforts to help educate enthusiasts and the public about the viable future of electric vehicles. ■



Kevin Clemens wants to build an even faster electric motorcycle.

Lore Kallanen

Brazil: Like America, even more so

— By *Tim Marchman '12*

Reaching from now to a time before William Shakespeare was born, the Afro-Brazilian experience spans a range of emotion from that felt by the mother bearing a child into bondage to that felt by the artist creating an entirely new mode of expression in music, dance or sculpture. It encompasses, essentially, all of humanity.

The Brazilian football experience, by contrast, dates back barely more than a century and should, in theory, dealing after all as it does with a ball being kicked back and forth, be circumscribed, inherently trivial.

It is no surprise, then, that to visit museums dedicated to the two subjects, as the Knight-Wallace fellows did in São Paulo in December, is to find one very fine museum and one overpowering experience. That the one dealing with sport provided the latter is a fine example of how much more the way a story is told can matter than what the story is.

São Paulo's Afro-Brazilian Museum, sited within the grand Ibirapuera Park among a run of cultural institutions designed by the great Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer, is a worthy monument to Afro-Brazilian life in all its size and contradiction. Counting thousands of artifacts grouped into exhibitions on such broad topics as syncretic religion, the lives of slaves, art and Africa, its collection seeks to touch every element of its subject.

From centuries-old ritual masks to works of contemporary photography, from the tools of manual labor to unbelievably elaborate costumes meant to represent the physical presence of the gods on earth to a replica of a slave ship, nearly every item on display is tangibly fraught with history.

Simply to walk from one end of the museum to the other is to be overwhelmed with the scale of the idea that is Brazil, and to have a sense of just how abstract and fragile an idea it is. (One might leave the museum with the sense that Brazil is like America, only more so.)

If the museum has a failing, it is that an idea is not a story, and that it is by listening to stories that we come to understand. The Afro-Brazilian Museum can

museum exploits about every medium known to man.

One massive exhibit, set up under the bleachers, projects film of the crowds during a game, with a roar just as deafening and loud as that one would experience in the bleachers during actual play. Just a few yards on, a small room that feels like a coffin projects grainy film of an ancient World Cup defeat while a muffled heartbeat pounds and then simply stops as Uruguay scores an infamous goal.

The point, a guide will tell you, is to remind the visitor that defeat is as much a part of Brazilian history as triumph, and an experience as worthy of savoring.

Each is compelling, but perhaps neither as much so as a silent room filled with ornately framed old photographs of old country clubs and jazz bands set on hinges that allow one to view them

front and back. In them one can see the rise of football as an expression of Brazilian Europhilia and the integration of the game on lines of class and race as a series of moments that show how Brazil came to accept and then to celebrate its own unique virtues. Those virtues amount, as the rest of the museum demonstrates, to something new in the world.

For its emphasis on the primacy of experience, its commitment to adventurous means of communication and its insistence that the world can be seen in a grain of sand, the Museum of Football is a startling place for anyone, but probably especially so for a journalist. One thing to set facts, even important ones, in order, and another to make them mean something. Or, as many an editor has said, one thing to tell, and another to show. ■



KWF '12 with Charles at the São Paulo Jockey Club

give you a sense of what Brazil is, but a trip to São Paulo's football museum will give you a sense of why.

Running along, and under, the bleachers of the Pacaembu Stadium, the Museum of Football is more modest, and certainly more austere, than the Afro-Brazilian Museum. And in many ways, it is best defined by what it is not and by what it does not have. Within the museum proper, for instance, there is only one actual artifact, a shirt Pelé wore in an important game. It is, as much as the Afro-Brazilian Museum, focused on memory, but the way in which it represents it is far less focused on things, and so in its way more powerful.

Multimedia is a word that has earned some dirty connotations over time, but in telling the story of Brazilian football, the

Melrose Funk

Argentina: Is America even relevant?

— By Steve Friess '12

First impressions of Argentina can be incredibly deceiving. Arriving in Buenos Aires following our week in intense, overwhelming São Paulo felt to many of us as though we'd arrived rather abruptly at the surface of a placid lake. The Argentine capital possesses gorgeous, European architecture, abundantly wide roads upon which traffic moves at a reasonable clip and an abiding sense that everything works in the way North Americans expect it to.

That we landed on the weekend of the second inauguration of Cristina Kirchner de Fernandez, the nation's first elected female president, only added to the sense of this as a modern, progressive country enjoying an economic boom that is the envy of the recession-tattered U.S. and Europe.

Yet we hadn't been in the country for a full 24 hours before we began hearing of the disturbing political undertow that has South American scholars and media figures on edge. At a retreat on an "estancia" in the Buenos Aires countryside, former KW fellow Miguel Wiñazki '03, an editor at *Clarín*, startled us with details of the



Miguel Wiñazki '03, columnist with *Clarín* newspaper, addresses the fellows on an estancia.

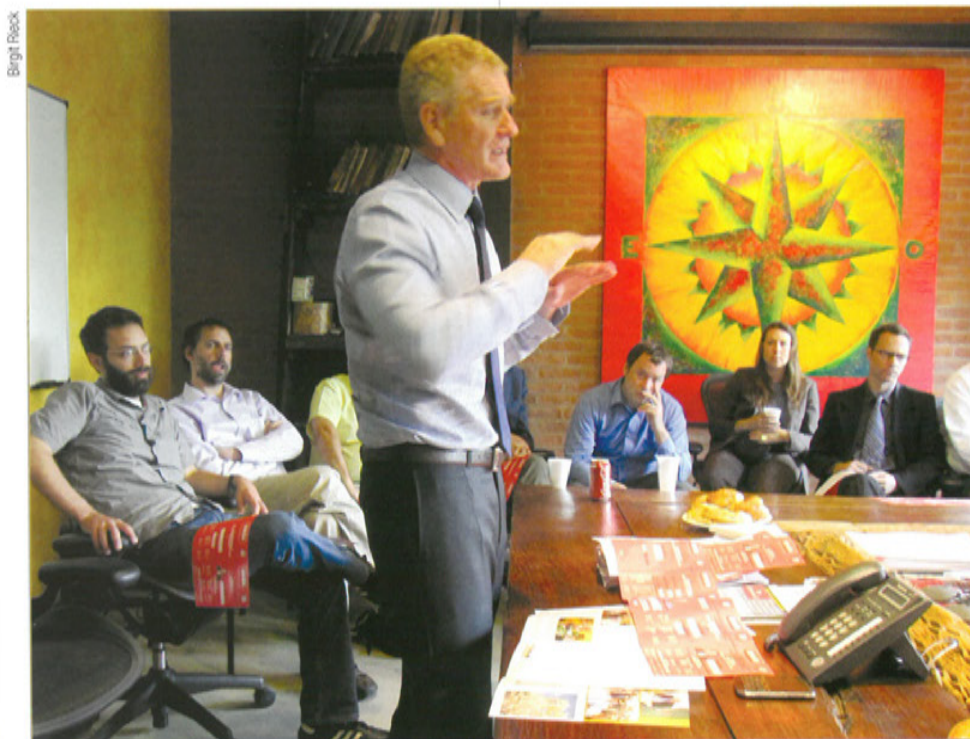
Kirchner regime's efforts to curtail press freedoms. Kirchner and *Clarín*—the nation's largest daily as well as KWF's Argentine sponsor—had been engaged in a long-running feud over the paper's hard-hitting coverage; Wiñazki offered harrowing accounts of devious manipulations

afoot to punish his staff and company.

Thus set the tone for our time in Buenos Aires, a week in which the paradoxes of Argentina became clearer and easy ways to comprehend this complicated society became appropriately more elusive. We met a banker and economist who saw the Kirchner administration's efforts to provide assistance to the poor as a positive motivator for an economy making a dramatic uptick, and we met a wealthy politician who believes it's merely a form of vote-buying that may ultimately bankrupt and destabilize the country.

To many of us, there seemed at times to be an air of paranoia surrounding the fears expressed by the *Clarín* editors and anti-Kirchner factions, and we would soon learn why. On our third day, we visited with a current Argentine senator, Norma Morandini, who introduced us to the concept of the "desparecidos," a population of people—estimates range from 10,000 to 30,000—snatched and murdered under the military junta that ruled and waged the terrorizing Dirty War from 1976 to 1983.

— continued on page 8



Francisco De Narvaez tells the fellows about his 2011 candidacy for governor of Buenos Aires Province.

Our Great Geniuses



Molly Ball '10, joined *The Atlantic* as a staff writer covering national politics. Previously, she was a reporter for *Politico*.

Bora Bayraktar '05, was named Euronews' correspondent in Istanbul. Previously, he was a reporter with Asia Television.



John Cary '09, was named deputy editor at *The Cambridge News*. Previously, he was editor of the BBC's *5live Drive*.



Debbie Caldwell '94, was named deputy editor at CNBC.com in charge of all non-breaking news. Previously, she was executive editor at Wetpaint.com.



Lynette Clemetson '10, joined NPR News to lead *StateImpact*, a collaboration between NPR and station groups in eight states that reports on state government actions and their impact on citizens and communities. Previously, she was director of content strategy at Pew Center on the States.



Scott Elliott '05, joined *The Indianapolis Star* as education reform reporter. Previously, he was an education reporter at *The Dayton Daily News*.



Gady Epstein '07, joined *The Economist* as China correspondent based in Beijing. Previously, he was Beijing bureau chief for *Forbes*.

Ron French '03, joined the Center for Michigan's *Bridge* magazine as senior writer. Previously, he was a projects reporter for *The Detroit News*.



Craig Gilbert '10, arranged and was one of the questioners at the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel's* editorial board chat with Herman Cain, whose painful struggle to answer a simple foreign policy question about Libya was a big part of his undoing as a Republican presidential contender. Gilbert is the *Journal-Sentinel's* Washington bureau chief.

Alfred Hermida '05, published his first book, "Participatory Journalism: Guarding Open Gates at Online Newspapers," which he co-authored. He's also been granted tenure and promoted to associate professor at the University of British Columbia.



Amber Hunt '11, was named the Associated Press' news editor for North and South Dakota. Previously, she was a reporter for *The Detroit Free Press*.

Baris Kuyucu '07, joined Al Jazeera Turkey as head of sports. Previously, he was sports news editor and anchor, CNN Turkey (Istanbul).



Mary Losure '04, will publish her first children's book, "The Fairy Ring, or Elsie and Frances Fool the World," a narrative nonfiction, this spring through Candlewick Press.



Peggy Lowe '09, was named Public Insight Network analyst for Harvest Public Media, an NPR project focused on food and agribusiness and based in Kansas City, Mo. Previously, she was a multimedia producer and writer at *The Orange County Register*.



Kevin Lowther



Herb Frazier

Kevin Lowther '77, and **Herb Frazier '93**, participated on the same panel during a conference, "Rebuilding Sierra Leone: Changing Institutions and Culture," at the University of South Carolina. Both have written books exploring the historical links between South Carolina and Sierra Leone through the slave trade. Frazier's is "Behind God's Back"; Lowther's is "The African American Odyssey of John Kizell."

Alec MacGillis '11, joined *The New Republic* as senior editor. Previously, he was national staff reporter for *The Washington Post*.

Jonathan Martin '09, teamed with fellow reporter Ken Armstrong of *The Seattle Times* to win first place in enterprise reporting in the C.B. Blethen Memorial Awards for Distinguished Newspaper Reporting, for "The Other Side of Mercy," a narrative series based on the fatal shootings of four Lakewood police officers in 2009.



Maryn McKenna '99, won the 2011 Science in Society Award for her book "Superbug: The Fatal Menace of MRSA,"

an investigation of the global epidemic of drug-resistant staph, published by Free Press/Simon & Schuster. She freelances, blogs for *Wired* and writes a column for *Scientific American*.

Ted Mellnik '11, joined the Graphics Department at *The Washington Post*. Previously, Mellnik was database editor at *The Charlotte Observer*.

Nick Perry '11, joined the Associated Press as a reporter covering New Zealand, the South Pacific and Antarctica. Previously, he was higher education reporter for *The Seattle Times*.

Melissa Preddy '05, was named communications director at the University of Michigan's Taubman Medical Research Institute.

Harry Siegel '11, was named metro columnist at *The Village Voice*. Previously, he was a contributing editor at *Politico*.

Laura Tillman '11S, won a Planned Parenthood Maggie Award in the daily/weekly print reporting category for her article "Crossing the Line" in *The Nation*.

Sharon Walsh '90, was named editor of the new Pittsburgh-based online regional investigative reporting initiative, PublicSource.org. Previously, she was enterprise editor for *The Lexington Herald-Leader*.



Fara Warner '06, joined *Newsweek Daily Beast* as the editorial director of international special editions, overseeing editorial operations for the company's foreign-language editions. She is based in New York City.



Ken Winter '79, was inducted into the Michigan Journalism Hall of Fame in Lansing. He is the former publisher of *The*

Petoskey News-Review and current political science and journalism professor at North Central Michigan College in Petoskey.

Ipek Yezdani '08, was named news desk editor of *The Hürriyet Daily News*, an English-language newspaper in Turkey.

IN MEMORIAM

Jerry Lee Morton KWF '77, journalist, photojournalist, historian at large and Michigan State University Spartan fan extraordinaire, died at age 67 in East Lansing on Jan. 24, 2011.

Are you a former fellow who should be included among our "Great Geniuses"? Send your news and a print-resolution photo to fellownews@umich.edu. Take it one step further by joining the conversation at kwfellows.org. You never know who you might bump into online.

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*Includes gender identity and gender expression

Candice Ueppa



Jill Abramson, executive editor of *The New York Times* and Knight Wallace board member, delivered the keynote address at U-M's Winter Commencement, telling students their dream job is attainable if they persevere. While she was in town she stopped by the Wallace House to chat with KWF '12.

KWF

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— Argentina: Is America even relevant? (continued from page 5)

Many of the “disappeared” included children, including two of Morandini’s brothers, the fates of whom were never resolved. Only in recent years has a memorial to those people been established at the secret detention center where many of those prisoners were held and tortured, a site we spent an afternoon taking in near the end of our week. After that, several fellows went on to observe a weekly demonstration conducted by a group of mothers of the disappeared who continue, three decades later, to march outside the presidential residence, Casa Rosada, to demand answers to questions that still torment them.

It is that this episode occurred so recently and after long stretches of a seemingly solid democratic system, that continues to have many Argentines nervous. We left Argentina fearful for her future, and only a week after we departed the Argentine Congress passed into law a measure giving the state more control over the nation’s newsprint supply. *Clarín* editors repeatedly told us that this was a

stealth measure to curb their ability to publish.

Another eye-opening moment—and perhaps an equally alarming one to American ears—was discovering just how irrelevant the United States is to Argentina’s economic life. Many of this year’s fellows have journalistic interests or backgrounds involving China, but gener-

ally we’ve documented the emerging Asian power through the lens of Sino-U.S. relations and, perhaps, China’s relevance to North Korea, Iran and Afghanistan. Yet, as with Brazil the prior week, in Argentina we came to understand that booming China has already largely eclipsed the United States, and the economic slowdown that has caused such pain in the Northern

Hemisphere has barely registered a ripple down south because of the Argentine involvement in trade with the People’s Republic.

That was all heavy, fascinating stuff, to be sure, but Argentina outwardly remained the charming, cosmopolitan city of its own lore, serving up gigantic portions of delicious beef, kicking up some stunning tango and showing its soccer-mad stripes at a match many fellows attended. Plus, Buenos Aires continues to capitalize on its most famous name; of course, we made the requisite visit to the cemetery where Eva Peron now rests. By the time we got there, though, we had come to realize that the nation is as confusing and contradictory as her legacy. ■



The “disappeared” haven’t been forgotten in Buenos Aires.