ALUMNI IN THE NEWS ROUNDUP: FALL 2010

From CNN International to MTV to American Idol to the Los Angeles Times and the Sacramento Bee, plenty of Cal Poly alumni made headlines this summer. Noted architecture alum 'Weird Al' Yankovic (Architecture, 1980) is on tour on the East Coast and writing a children's book. A 2009 business grad has completed his bike trek from the tip of Alaska to Tierra del Fuego. Two engineering alumni were in the news again for disseminating their dissection of Apple's latest gadgets -- and the business they launched in their dorm room now has 25 employees. A speech communication alumna is now a central part of a new MTV reality show set in New York City. A journalism alumna is leading public affairs at the Disneyland Resort. A biological sciences alumnus has been named to coordinate research on a dangerous bacterial disease that strikes livestock and wildlife. Find out about alumni who made headlines recently -- and if you know them.

Headliners

Business Alum Dane Drewis Chases the American (Idol) Dream

All Dane Drewis had was 20 seconds. Twenty seconds to impress Sacramento "American Idol" judges who've been around and heard it all. Twenty seconds to nail a bluesy rendition of Michael Jackson's "The Way You Make Me Feel." Drewis (Business Administration, 2004) a 27-year-old musician, auditioned for the popular television show recently. Photo courtesy DaneDrewis.com
Read more about Drewis in the Sacramento Bee

Business Alum Stephen Brown to Lead Research Center at University of Nevada Las Vegas

The University of Nevada, Las Vegas has hired former Federal Reserve economist Stephen Brown (Economics, 1972) as executive director of its Center for Business and Economic Research. Brown recently retired as director of energy economics for the Federal Reserve Bank in Dallas, where he was widely recognized for his knowledge of world energy markets and the effects of energy price shocks on economic activity. Read the story in the Las Vegas Review Journal (see left sidebar)

Alumna is Glamour.com Columnist and Part of New MTV Reality Show

Shallon Lester (B.S., Speech Communications, 2003) is a writer for Glamour.com and one of a handful of women who are the subject of "Downtown Girls," a new MTV reality show. It follows the professional and personal lives of five 20-something women living in New York City. Read about Lester in the Orange County Register

Biological Sciences Alum to Coordinate Research at University of Wyoming

Walt Cook (B.S., Biological Sciences, 1989) has been hired to coordinate brucellosis research at the University of Wyoming and among several universities across the country where research is being conducted. His research priorities are vaccine development (for both cattle and wildlife) and improved diagnostic tests for the bacterial disease. Cook worked as assistant state veterinarian and state veterinarian for the Wyoming Livestock Board before coming to UW. In addition to his Cal Poly degree, Cook earned his doctorate of veterinary medicine degree in 1994 from UC Davis and his doctorate in zoology and physiology from UW in 1999. Read about Cook on the University of Wyoming web site

iFixit Alumni in the Los Angeles Times

Alumni Kyle Wiens (Computer Science, 2005) and Luke Soules (Industrial Engineering, 2006) were in the headlines again in June for dissecting Apples -- the latest iPad, to be specific. The 26-year-olds met as freshmen at Cal Poly and created iFixit. Wiens was a computer science major looking for a Web project. Soules, an engineering major, was selling parts on eBay for spare cash. Seven years later, iFixit has 25 employees, a profit record and a company web site that attracts millions of viewers for its "teardown" videos of the latest tech gadgets. Photo: CEO Kyle Wiens tears down an iBook G4 | Photo Courtesy iFixit.com
Read the LA Times story on iFixit

Architecture Alum enjoys Sustainable Living Among the Clouds

In the 1970s, when Michael Faulconer (Architecture, 1977) first saw the vacant property high atop the hill in scenic Ventura, it piqued the curiosity of the budding architect. The view was perfection, the locale, paradise, but the steep hillside — now that was a challenge. Read the entire story in Ventura County Star.
Business Alum Rides from Prudhoe Bay to Tierra del Fuego

Cal Poly graduate David Sacher (Business Administration, '09) trekked by bicycle from the tip of Alaska to the bottom of South America. His seven-month journey included overcoming stomach sickness, knee pain and robbery attempts on the Pan-American highway. Sacher began his journey from Alaska to Argentina in July 2009, a month after he graduated with a degree in business. He’s got a blog full of photos and writing about the trip. Read about Sacher in the San Luis Obispo Tribune

'Weird Al' is Writing Children's Book

Famous alumnus 'Weird Al' Yankovic (Architecture, '80) is on tour on the East Coast and also working on a children's book. He says the book is partially inspired by his 7-year-old daughter. "When I Grow Up" will be published by HarperCollins in the winter of 2011. Yankovic said the young spirit reflected in his book is what he likes most about his job. "I don't have to grow up," he told the Watertown Daily Times. "I don't have to be an adult. I've always been passionate about music and comedy and I feel blessed to be able to do both for a living."

'Weird Al' Yankovic in the new KCPR studios at Cal Poly in 2007

Read more in the Watertown Daily Times

Academic Honors

Alumni Receive Honorary Degrees

Kazunori Katayama (pictured right), Frank Suzuki, Nelson Akagi and Taro Kobara came to campus in June after 70 years to receive honorary degrees as part of the California State University's Nisei Degree Program. The four were among some 30 Cal Poly students who had their education interrupted when the government sent them to internment camps during World War II. Kazunori Katayama talks to reporters at Cal Poly | Photo by Chris Leashinsky

Read the story on Cal Poly's Nisei Commencement in Rafu Shimpo

Journal Article by Liberal Arts Alum Bruce Ellis Wins American Psychological Association Award

An article from Springer's journal Human Nature, "Fundamental dimensions of environmental risk," has been selected as the winner of the George A. Miller Award by the American Psychological Association (APA). The lead author of the paper, Bruce Ellis (Social Sciences, 1986) will present aspects of the paper at next year's APA meeting. Ellis is an expert in neurobiological susceptibility to environmental influence.

More on Ellis on PhysOrg.com

Business Alum Receives UC Berkeley Award

Dana Nelson (Business Administration 2003), the portfolio manager at Bell Investment Advisors, Inc., has received the Richard P. Arzaga 2010 Outstanding Student Award from UC Berkeley Extension's Personal Financial Planning program. Nelson is completing his coursework in the two-year program. The Arzaga award recognizes outstanding academic performance, leadership, and participation outside the classroom.

Read the PR Newswire Story

Politics

Ag Alum Maldonado Sworn in as California's Lieutenant Governor - then Steps in as Acting Governor

It's been a big year for Abel Maldonado (Crop Science, 1988). The California state senator was sworn in as lieutenant governor April 27. Then he appeared on Comedy Central's Colbert Report to promote the "open primary" measure on California's June ballot, which he supported. (California voters approved it). Then, with Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger out of state on a tour through Asia in September, Maldonado stepped in as acting governor. He made international news when CNN crews filmed him helping families who lost their home in the San Bruno pipeline blast. Maldonado declared a state of emergency in San Mateo County and marshaled money and resources to the scene. He also made statewide headlines for signing legislation that gave money to schools and returned taxes to residents of the city of Bell in the Los Angeles area (which is in the middle of a scandal over pay to city executives and council members).

Read the SLO Tribune story on Maldonado's appointment

Read the Santa Cruz Sentinel story on Maldonado's six days as acting governor

Two Alumni Battling for Same California Assembly Seat Pledge to Keep It Civil

Two Cal Poly business alumni battling for the same state assembly seat may be members of opposing political parties, but they're taking the high road in their campaigns. Republican Katcho Achadjian, (Business Administration, 1976) a San Luis Obispo County supervisor and businessman, and Democrat Hilda Zacarias (Business Administration, 1989), an accountant and Santa Maria City councilwoman, have signed a 'campaign ethics' pledge as part of their race. "This is how you stop the gridlock," Zacarias said as she and Achadjian embraced at a debate after the pair were asked how they would stop gridlock in Sacramento. The duo, while philosophically opposed on many issues, have made a point of showing that they like and respect one another. They believe it to be especially important in a national, state and local political climate that has turned venomous.

Read The Tribune's editorial approval of the Mustang alums' campaign ethics pledge

Read the entire story in the San Luis Obispo Tribune
Career Moves

Finance Alum Named Investment Firm Controller

DoubleLine Capital LP has named Henry Chase (Economics, 1974) as Controller. In addition to his Cal Poly degree, Chase holds a master's degree in finance from San Diego State University. He has more than 30 years of financial and administrative experience in public and private companies, including a partnership with Southern California company Tatum LLC and the 1928 jewelry company.

Merit's Welch Named Grant Thornton Leader & Innovator of the Year

Donald J. Welch Jr., (M.S., Computer Science, 1987) president and CEO of Merit Network Inc. in Ann Arbor, has been named Grant Thornton Leader & Innovator of the Year. The award is co-sponsored by Lawrence Technological University. Welch was chosen from among 46 nominees. The Leaders & Innovators program was developed by Lawrence Tech to recognize Michigan business executives who have demonstrated unique abilities or created unique products. In addition to his Cal Poly degree, Welch earned a doctorate in computer science from the University of Maryland.

Architecture Alum Joins Bank Board of Directors

Henry Ruhnke Jr. (B.AR., Architecture, 1987, M.AR., 1988) has been appointed to the 1st Capital Bank Board of Directors in Monterey. Ruhnke has served on the Monterey Planning Commission, the Monterey Community Contractor Committee and the Monterey Architectural Review Committee. He is a former board member of the American Institute of Architects Monterey Bay.

Business Alum Named Executive of the Year by California Hispanic Chambers of Commerce

Tulare-Kings Hispanic Chamber of Commerce's Raymond Macareno (Business, 2004) was named the 2010 Executive of the Year by the California Hispanic Chambers of Commerce at its annual convention in Los Angeles. Macareno is a former small-business owner and has been at the helm of the TKHCC since November 2008.

Planning Grad is New Mill Valley City Manager

Calistoga City Manager Jim McCann (Natural Resources Management, 1983) is the new city manager in Mill Valley. McCann had been with the city of Calistoga for 12 years, first as the city's planning director in 1998 and then as city manager since December 1999.

Athletics

Alumna Inducted to Rowing Hall of Fame

Alumna and Olympic medalist Karen Kraft Rigsby was inducted into the National Rowing Hall of Fame. Rigsby (Home Economics, 1992) is now in her second season as assistant coach at the University of Wisconsin, working in the women's openweight rowing program. She earned a silver medal at the 1996 Olympics and a bronze medal in the 2000 Olympics in the pair. Rigsby was named US Rowing's Female Athlete of the Year after both medals and was nominated for the United States Olympic Committee's Sportswoman of the Year award in 1996 and 2000.

Passings

Ernie Cooper (Social Sciences), a former Mustang football player, died in his sleep in July from heart failure. Ernie was born June 17, 1985 in Tyler, Texas. He spent the majority of his life in Whittier, Calif., where he attended La Serna High School. He was an outstanding student athlete, earning numerous awards including the Student Athlete of the year, class of 2004. He was recruited by Cal Poly as a quarterback, moved to wide receiver and slotback in 2006 and 2007 and was a defensive back in his final season with the Mustangs.

Nikki Smith Blose (Psychology, 1996), died June 13. She was born in Modesto and raised in Stockton and was a child welfare worker for 13 years in Santa Barbara County. In addition to her Cal Poly degree, she earned a master's degree from Antioch while raising three daughters as a single parent.

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