

The York University Magazine

Extra Dry



The shift toward sobriety

Summer 2024

The
York University
Magazine

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THE PRESIDENT



RHONDA L. LENTON
PRESIDENT AND VICE-CHANCELLOR

GOOD HEALTH IS ESSENTIAL to our individual and collective sense of well-being. It is also foundational to thriving and successful societies. Simply put, healthy communities rely on healthy individuals. Yet, despite being one of the healthiest countries in the world, Canada faces a serious health-equity crisis that is set to balloon in the next decade.

York's bold vision for a School of Medicine aims to address health equity by accelerating the path to graduation for primary-care physicians in Canada and by promoting interdisciplinary, team-based care. It will deliver a patient-centred curriculum and learning model with inclusive and equitable access across an expansive and diverse service area. In April, the Government of Ontario proudly endorsed York's proposal for a School of Medicine with a \$9-million investment in funding as part of the province's 2024 budget, noting that the School of Medicine will connect more families with high-quality, accessible care.

The timing could not be more critical – currently, an estimated one in five Canadians do not have a family physician, which can mean a lack of the continuity of care essential to promoting long-term health and well-being. Building on York's global leadership in health, the School of Medicine will include a community-based approach that places the social determinants of health at the forefront of the curriculum.

As the first school in Canada focused on training primary-care physicians, the students enrolled at York's School of Medicine will benefit from opportunities to train in multiple settings while learning from world-class faculty. Programs will be anchored in an approach that views the community as our classroom while leveraging the most recent emerging technologies. The anchor facility will be in the Vaughan Healthcare Centre Precinct, co-located with Mackenzie Health's Cortellucci Vaughan Hospital, the first new hospital to be built in Ontario in more than 30 years.

This is an important milestone for York, but also for Canada. I am grateful for the ongoing support and enthusiasm of our donors and the many partners throughout our service area in northern Toronto, York Region, Simcoe County, the District of Muskoka and adjacent rural areas who are working with us.

There is still much to be done to realize the improved health and health care we envision in the future. Establishing a School of Medicine is a collective effort, and I look forward to working with our internal and external communities, including our alumni, as we advance our plans for a transformational new School of Medicine that will help us drive positive change both locally and globally.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SOFIE KIRK

EDITOR'S NOTES



Shake It Up

Raise a glass – or don't. This summer, *The York University Magazine* invites you to explore a spirited (yet spirit-free) cultural shift – the burgeoning “sober curious” movement. Our cover story delves into this intriguing departure from societal drinking norms. Drawing insights from experts at York University, we immerse ourselves in the vibrant sober subculture thriving in contrast to traditional drinking scenes. From crafting artisanal mocktails to all-night dance parties fuelled by coconut water, we examine the nuanced science behind addiction and recovery, offering a refreshing perspective on cultivating balanced lifestyles.

This is not the only convention-defying narrative contained within these pages. We spotlight Jane Goodall, whose pioneering conservation work fundamentally challenges our relationship with nature. Dexter Janke's professional journey as the new York Lions football coach showcases the power of perseverance in an arena often celebrating fleeting glory. York grad Arun Srinivasan shares his visionary lighting design for a Stratford Festival world-premiere production, illuminating an art form where innovation shakes up tradition.

Pushing boundaries further, our feature on Arctic security addresses an emerging global issue that is typically overshadowed. A story on young philosophers examines history's pivotal

ideas through York's innovative lens, re-energizing an age-old discipline. We also amplify vital voices challenging systemic barriers and advocating for greater equity and inclusion of Black Canadians in business, technology and other sectors.

These compelling narratives, combined with our award-winning writing, design and photography, embody *The York University Magazine's* commitment to innovation, inclusivity and excellence. They affirm our mission to deliver top-tier content reflecting York's vibrant spirit.

As you turn these pages, immerse yourself in a curated selection designed to quench your intellectual curiosity while basking in summer's warmth. For this defines the very essence of *The York University Magazine* – ever probing, ever insightful, ever defying expectations.

Cheers! ● — Deirdre Kelly

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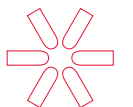
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ON THE COVER



Extra Dry
Photography by
Chris Robinson



View

OUTLOOK & IDEAS

FROST WARNING

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS ROBINSON

York professors brave the evolving landscape of Arctic security

IN THE LAST FEW DECADES, global warming has driven Arctic permafrost and sea-ice levels to new lows. As the ice decreases, nations such as Russia and China are beginning to eye routes such as the Northwest Passage as potential courses for resource extraction and navigation. “It may not be 10 years, it may not be 20 years, but with the rate of climate change it’s inevitable,” says Susan Pond, the director of York’s Glendon School of Public and International Affairs (GSPIA).

Pond says now is the time to start thinking about how Canada might work with its allies in the Arctic to ensure that the region doesn’t become commercially over-exploited.

Pond is no stranger to international politics. Before stepping into the role of director at GSPIA, she served as a NATO staff member for 30 years. “Except for Russia, all of the Arctic countries are NATO nations,” she says.

In November, Pond moderated a conversation at Glendon that highlighted this growing concern. The speakers included the former prime minister of Greenland and York University social scientist Professor Gabrielle Slowey, and topics ranged from economic development to geopolitics to developing safer commercial trade routes.

But, as Slowey pointed out, Arctic security is not a one-way street. Canadians need to think about keeping the region safe not only from foreign threats, but also from internal devastation. Through her work, Slowey hopes to draw attention to the needs of the Indigenous people who have lived there for thousands of years.

As the ice melts and the Arctic becomes increasingly accessible, the odds of a visitor accidentally sparking a deadly epidemic in one of these towns multiplies exponentially. Building better health-care infrastructure for Arctic inhabitants should be a top priority, Slowey says. And most importantly, “we need to hear the voices of people from the Arctic.” ●

—Joanna Thompson



PRESCRIPTION FOR THE FUTURE

York to establish Canada’s first primary care-focused medical school

THIS SPRING, York University unveiled plans to launch a pioneering medical school in Vaughan, Ont., emphasizing primary-care training. While the province currently has six long-standing medical schools, including the University of Toronto and McMaster University, the addition of York’s primary care-focused program represents a strategic shift in medical education.

Set to open in September 2028, the York University School of Medicine aims to address the shortage of family physicians in Ontario. This focus aligns with the essential role primary-care physicians play in delivering comprehensive health care to individuals and families, emphasizing continuity of care and community health.

York President and Vice-Chancellor Rhonda Lenton highlighted the significance of this initiative at the time of the announcement, noting that this “marks a milestone in York’s commitment to health-care education, addressing a crucial need for accessible health-care providers.”

To be located near the Cortellucci Vaughan Hospital and a forthcoming long-term care facility, the school will initially offer 80 undergraduate and 102 postgraduate seats, expanding to 240 undergraduate and 293 postgraduate seats annually. ●

—Staff

ETHICS, IDEALS AND INTEGRATION

York's new Centre for AI & Society
advances innovations for the common good

PHOTOGRAPHY BY HORST HERGET

IN A BID to spearhead socially conscious artificial intelligence (AI) initiatives, York University has unveiled its latest endeavour: the Centre for AI & Society (CAIS). Co-headed by Professor James Elder, the York Research Chair in Human and Computer Vision, CAIS aims to bridge the gap between technological advancements and societal needs.

The centre combines different areas of research, including behavioural and neuroscience studies, computational modelling, statistical analysis and computer-vision design. Its main goal is to improve our understanding of how humans perceive the world and enhance artificial intelligence. This research also has practical applications in areas such as transportation, robotics and sports analysis.

"CAIS is one of the founding Organized Research Units (ORU) of Connected Minds, which unites research on neuroscience, AI and technology to foster a healthy and just society," Elder says. "It is particularly important in generating novel and beneficial technologies that will improve quality of life in Canada and elsewhere, but also in understanding how these disruptive technologies can best be integrated into society in order to minimize risk and maximize benefit for all."

The establishment of CAIS aligns with York University's strategic vision outlined in its 2018–2023 Strategic Research Plan, which identified AI integration into society as a crucial area for development. To make it happen, Elder collaborated with Osgoode Hall Law School Professor Pina D'Agostino (BA '96, LLB '99) to form and lead a task force to evaluate York's AI landscape and chart a course for future research development.

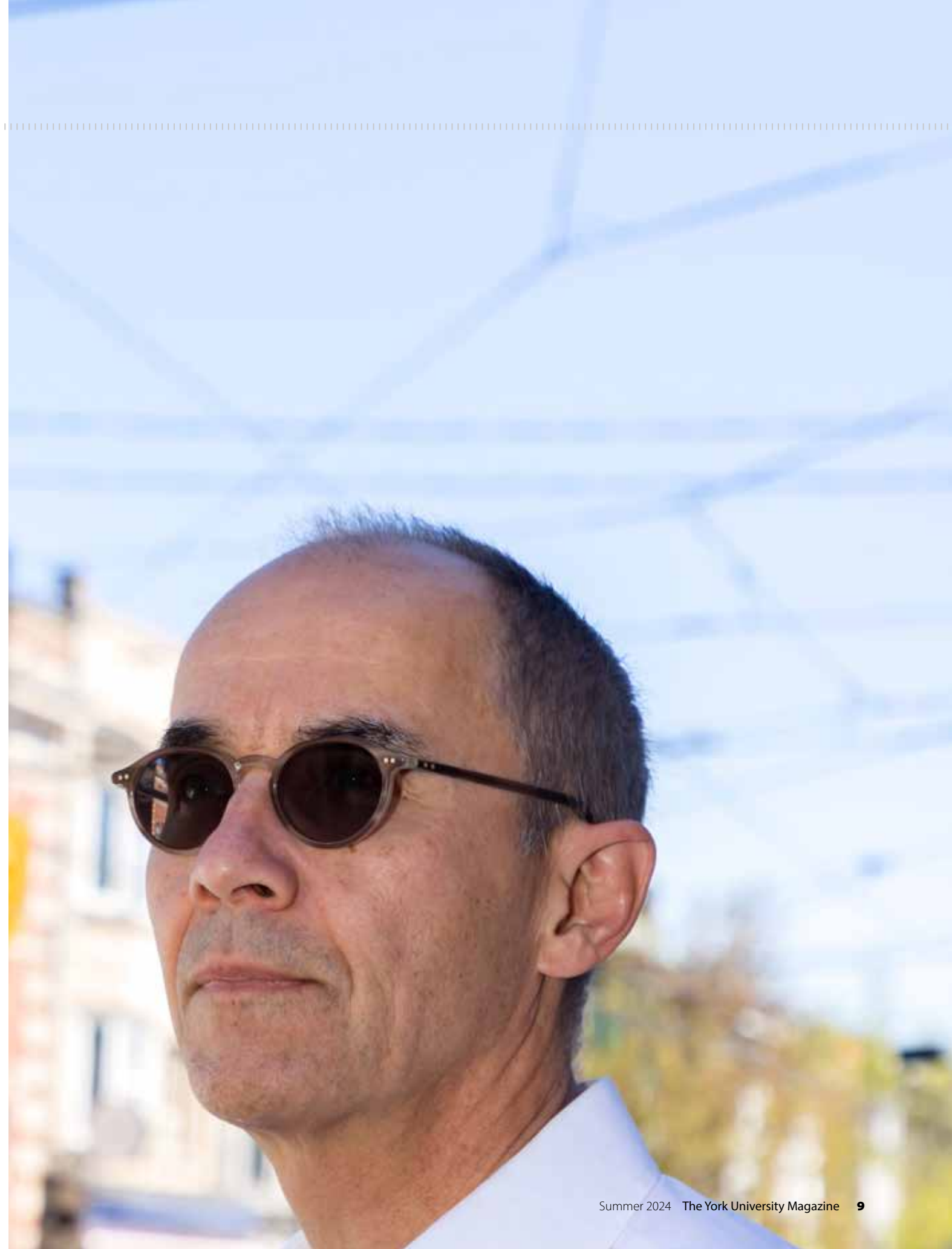
Their findings, published in the influential report "Fostering the Future of Artificial Intelligence," laid the groundwork for CAIS, which officially launched in July 2022, uniting faculty members from diverse backgrounds and faculties.

Guided by Elder and D'Agostino, CAIS's mission extends beyond academic discourse. The centre aims to foster a sense of community among researchers engaged in AI and society studies, while promoting dialogue through lectures and conferences. Notable speakers, including Moshe Vardi (from Rice University), Kate Kalcevich (from leading accessibility company Fable) and Ioannis Pitas (from the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki) have so far appeared at CAIS-sponsored events, lecturing on critical issues such as technology and democracy, and disability considerations in AI.

Looking ahead, CAIS intends to expand its seminar series while hosting additional conferences, and involve more trainees, including graduate students and postdoctoral fellows.

These efforts align with York University's broader institutional goals under the interdisciplinary \$318.4-million Connected Minds initiative, which is currently investigating how emerging technologies, such as AI, are impacting and transforming society.

As AI continues to evolve at a rapid pace, CAIS remains committed to driving innovation while ensuring responsible AI deployment. "Our systems approach places emphasis on how AI technologies operate when embedded in real-world contexts, interacting with humans and other technologies," Elder says. "Our research focuses on AI systems that address societal priorities in health care, smart cities and sustainability, and that are fair, explainable, reliable and trusted." ●



York's Faculty of Education unveils a transformative renovation



AFTER MORE THAN FIVE DECADES of inspiring critical thinking and influencing the field of education, York University's Faculty of Education has undertaken a transformative renovation of its original 1960s-era building on the Keele Campus. The extensive project, which began in 2018 with a comprehensive space-needs analysis, has breathed new life into the facility, positioning it as a modern, welcoming and accessible hub for the next generation of educators.

One of the key priorities of the renovations was to create a more student-friendly environment. The new layout features increased natural light and improved acoustics, creating a conducive atmosphere for learning and collaboration. Undergraduate services have been consolidated for greater convenience, while teaching assistants now have dedicated spaces to support their vital roles. Graduate students can now enjoy a state-of-the-art, 24-7 lounge with amenities such as lockers, kitchenettes and meeting rooms. In addition to enhancing the student experience, the renovations have also optimized spaces for faculty research labs and science instruction classrooms.

These updated facilities will support the Faculty's innovative approaches to education research and teaching. The Faculty's excellence is being recognized globally, as evidenced by its impressive placement in the 2024 QS World University Rankings by Subject, where it was ranked 66th in the world for education programs.

This prestigious global recognition underscores the Faculty's dedication to nurturing a learning environment where students are empowered to challenge conventional thinking and cultivate innovative approaches to education. ●

— Deirdre Kelly

NEW LOOK AT LEARNING

PHOTOGRAPHY BY KYLE FINBOW



LIGHTS OUT

PATRICIA LAKIN-THOMAS has spent her scientific career – first at the University of Cambridge, in the U.K., and, since 2002, as a professor of biology at York – probing a question that lies at the nexus of biology, astronomy and even philosophy: why do living things need internal clocks that are finely tuned to the cycle of day and night?

The key lies within an intriguing fungus called *Neurospora crassa*, a focal point of Lakin-Thomas's research as the head of York's Clocklab. A unique York scholarly initiative, the lab specializes in investigating the biological clocks of various organisms, shedding light on their intricate mechanisms.

The *Neurospora* organism – sometimes found on old bread – is neither a pathogen nor a yeast. Its role in the grand scheme of things is to digest the charred matter in the wake of a forest fire. As Lakin-Thomas explains, “it doesn't attack live plants. It certainly doesn't attack people. It just is one of those wonderful organisms that clears away dead stuff in the environment.”

Neurospora, as it turns out, also has a biological clock, a bit like the circadian system that makes us sleepy at night and wakeful during the day. This fungus tends to build up proteins at night and throw off spores – a highly energy-intensive process – after dawn, so it can propagate.

In the plant world, the environmental differences between day and night are huge, due to the heat and energy of the sun. Plants need the cooler temperatures and the lack of light to prepare themselves for the process of photosynthesis that takes place during the day.

“We can show from some simple lab experiments that

organisms that are in sync with the light/dark cycle survive and compete better than those that are out of sync with it,” Lakin-Thomas says.

In other words, the evolutionary advantage goes to organisms that pay attention to their bedtimes, with a few exceptions, such as cave-dwelling crabs and fish.

As Lakin-Thomas points out, there's now a significant body of empirical evidence to show that poor sleep is associated with cardiovascular diseases, obesity and other chronic conditions.

“In particular, we've got lots of research on the declining health of shift workers. Shift work has actually been declared a potential carcinogen by the World Health Organization,” she says.

While her work is in pure science, Lakin-Thomas has recently begun to dedicate more of her research energy to the habits of contemporary society – daylight saving time, late-night scrolling on a smartphone – that disrupt rhythms that have been literally programmed into our DNA for millions of years.

The genes linked to the internal clocks of *Neurospora*, she has discovered, can also be found in cells that produce various proteins linked to metabolism – a connection that helps explain why we're more susceptible to weight gain from eating late at night.

“We keep telling people, as part of your sleep hygiene, to get a good night's sleep and to get your circadian clock well organized with the day,” Lakin-Thomas says. “Try to get up at sunrise and then keep those blue screens away from you at night.” ● — *John Lorinc*

YORK'S CLOCKLAB UNCOVERS THE EVOLUTIONARY EDGE OF BEDTIMES

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS ROBINSON



Big thinkers on a podcast where Plato and company have nowhere to hide

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE FORD

OF ALL THE THINGS one can bring up in social situations, philosophy is hardly the sexiest. Mentioning that one studies or even has a predilection for philosophy is bound to release nervous titters and uncomfortable shrugs. If you go further and claim philosophy as a major area of study, another question inevitably pops up: “Wow, how do you make a living?”

Today, 2,500 years after Socrates, philosophy has the unenviable position of being generally thought of as the domain of unsunned dorks and ivory-tower academics. This, even though pretty much every foundational underpinning of our society, from our system of governance, to our jurisprudence, social norms and even our most popular forms of enjoyment, would be unthinkable without it.

Plato’s dialogues, Aristotle’s ethics, Marcus Aurelius’s *Meditations*, Hobbes’s *Leviathan*, Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations* and Marx’s *Capital*: every one of these works has profoundly shaped our institutional praxis and the lives of millions. Even so, the subtler nuances of philosophy are hardly fodder for podcasts, even as ongoing political grudge matches devour the lion’s share of cyberspace.

A group of philosophy graduates from York, led by the intrepid Erik Tate (MA ’16), a York PhD candidate and founder of the initiative, is bravely filling the gap. Their weekly podcast, “Plastic Pills,” endeavours to explore even the densest philosophical topics with irreverence, wild detours and plenty of spicy humour

“Plastic Pills” episodes unfold like grad night confabs where no topic is off limits, profanity rings freely, free association is encouraged and the participants, when they get around to it, really know their stuff. It allows us regular, non-bookish mortals to be flies on the wall while some very well-informed young philosophers dish out the intellectual goods. Which might explain why the podcast is popular – 1.1 million downloads since the launch of the first episode in the spring of 2020. That’s a lot of people digging philosophy.

And here’s why: the emphasis is on nuance, differences of opinion and irresolvable complexity. It’s not unusual, for instance, for episodes to end with no definite conclusion.

Instead of a red pill or blue pill, in other words, they offer a plastic one (if we take plastic to mean the opposite of rigid).

The format is no accident. “The ‘shoot the breeze,’ casual hang out vibe is totally intentional,” says Tate, who drew inspiration from a friend’s popular philosophy YouTube channel, also named Plastic Pills.

“During the pandemic we wanted to think of a way to present group philosophical discussion in a very relaxed, informal and interdisciplinary fashion,” Tate says. “The original Plastic Pills channel – the founder of which prefers to remain anonymous – served as an inspiration for us, but in a single-person, narrative format. Even so, he inspired us to gather together like grad students unwinding at the bar after a long day.”

It has proven popular enough to persist. The group has released more than 150 episodes on subjects as diverse as Maurice Merleau-Ponty and free will, political fairy tales of the left and right, gothic horror and Edgar Allan Poe, Michel Foucault and the state, the neo-Kantian fascism of Nick Land, and the last Christian intellectuals. It’s a healthy grab bag, in other words, of all things both eye-wateringly abstruse and geekily popular.

It’s not always pleasant. One episode dissecting the controversial views of celebrity left-wing philosopher Slavoj Žižek became so heated that a discussion member had to step away and cool down. Minutes later they returned while everyone wondered aloud if the episode would be aired at all.

It was a stunningly rare moment. Even rarer because the discussion continued and everyone parted as friends at the end. It was a revelatory, concrete demonstration of how individuals from different ideological bubbles can disagree and still continue talking.

While the group didn’t come to a unanimous agreement, it highlighted the value of pluralism in intellectual discussions. Tate attributes this emphasis on embracing diverse opinions to York.

“York’s program is intentionally interdisciplinary, in a way that other philosophy programs are not. It offers the core humanities and classical philosophy while allowing you freedom to pursue your own chosen topic. You can build a unique committee, search for a supervisor that suits you. It’s certainly broader than elsewhere.” ●
— David Jager

SWALLOWING THE PHILOSOPHY PILL

A photograph of a shattered glass tumbler on a yellow surface with glass shards scattered around it. The glass is broken into several pieces, with the largest fragment still standing upright but heavily cracked. The background is a dark, warm brown color.

Extra Dry

BY JOHN LORINC
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS ROBINSON

The shift toward sobriety in today's drinking culture



CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST MATTHEW KEOUGH, a psychology professor in York's Faculty of Health, has spent much of his career focused on the drinking habits of young adults, the cohort of the population most likely to go too far with alcohol.

FROM HIS RESEARCH and clinical work, he knows that heavy drinking for 18- to 29-year-olds often comes with fellow travellers: emotional issues, excessive drug use, social anxiety.

Keough also reckons that one approach to reaching his patients – to meet them where they live – is to use smartphones and other digital technologies to head off the excessive consumption that can derail education or budding careers and lay waste to relationships.

“I’ve developed a lot of digital interventions for what we call ‘concurrent disorders,’” he explains. “When you have a substance-use disorder and you have an emotional disorder, what do you do? Well, you can treat these in integrated ways [with] the same intervention. Can we do it in hip ways for young people? We have app-based treatments. We have online treatments, and I’m doing lots of work now on how to tailor these digital interventions for smartphones.”

Keough cites another example, a “cool” smartwatch fitted out with a “transdermal alcohol sensor” that can detect when someone’s had a few drinks over a short span of time. It then signals the wearer that it’s time to slow down. “You can get in there before they’ve had a chance to drink heavily, so they can get warning messages and harm-reduction strategies.”

But the question – which is not new, but still lacks an all-encompassing answer – has to do with the end goal of such interventions, as well as other more traditional treatments: should the goal be moderation or full-on sobriety? And if the

latter, is there a scientific case to be made for not just cutting out alcohol, but also the psychological and physiological benefits of sobriety?

Last year, the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction released a meta-study to support a new and controversial set of guidelines – two drinks a week or less to prevent alcohol-related health risks. More than two, the guidelines say, and individuals face heightened risk for various cancers, heart disease, stroke and alcohol-related injuries.

“The culture with respect to how we’re thinking about safe levels of use is changing,” Keough says. “A lot of people say, ‘Well, two is nothing.’ It’s a personal decision for them about what’s the safe level of use. So when we’re talking about harm reduction or sobriety, we have these public health strategies that don’t always make their way to the individual.”

Yet our culture is throwing out all kinds of mixed messages. “Dry January,” for example, has become increasingly popular over the past decade, and many people who abstain for a month report better sleep, less anxiety, weight loss and reduced blood pressure. The trend is most popular among younger people, although researchers in the U.K. have also cast doubt on the presumed benefits because post-holiday socializing tapers off anyway and then reverts in warmer weather.

What is clear, however, is that an alcohol-free brain looks and functions differently than the brain of someone who drinks heavily. “What actually happens to your brain when

THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF THERAPY IS GOING TO BE THAT I'D WANT YOU TO ACTUALLY GO INTO A PUB WITH YOUR FRIENDS, AND THAT YOU REMAIN SOBER

you're using substances heavily and chronically is that certain regions of your brain become hijacked," Keough says. MRI scans have shown that alcohol can disrupt dopamine response and impair memory. "When you achieve some level of abstinence, then some neuroplasticity kicks in and some of these regions [of the brain] start returning to their normal state."

"The brain does play a huge role," adds psychologist Benedict Weobong, a mental health epidemiologist and professor at York's School of Global Health. "Neuroscience has made us know that young people are naturally wired to take risks."

While the brain science is compelling, it is only part of the story. Genetics and environment play their part, as do cultural norms and shifting theories about the impact of alcohol, as well as the virtues of sobriety. Social historian Craig Heron, a York professor emeritus who is the author of *Booze: A Distilled History*, points

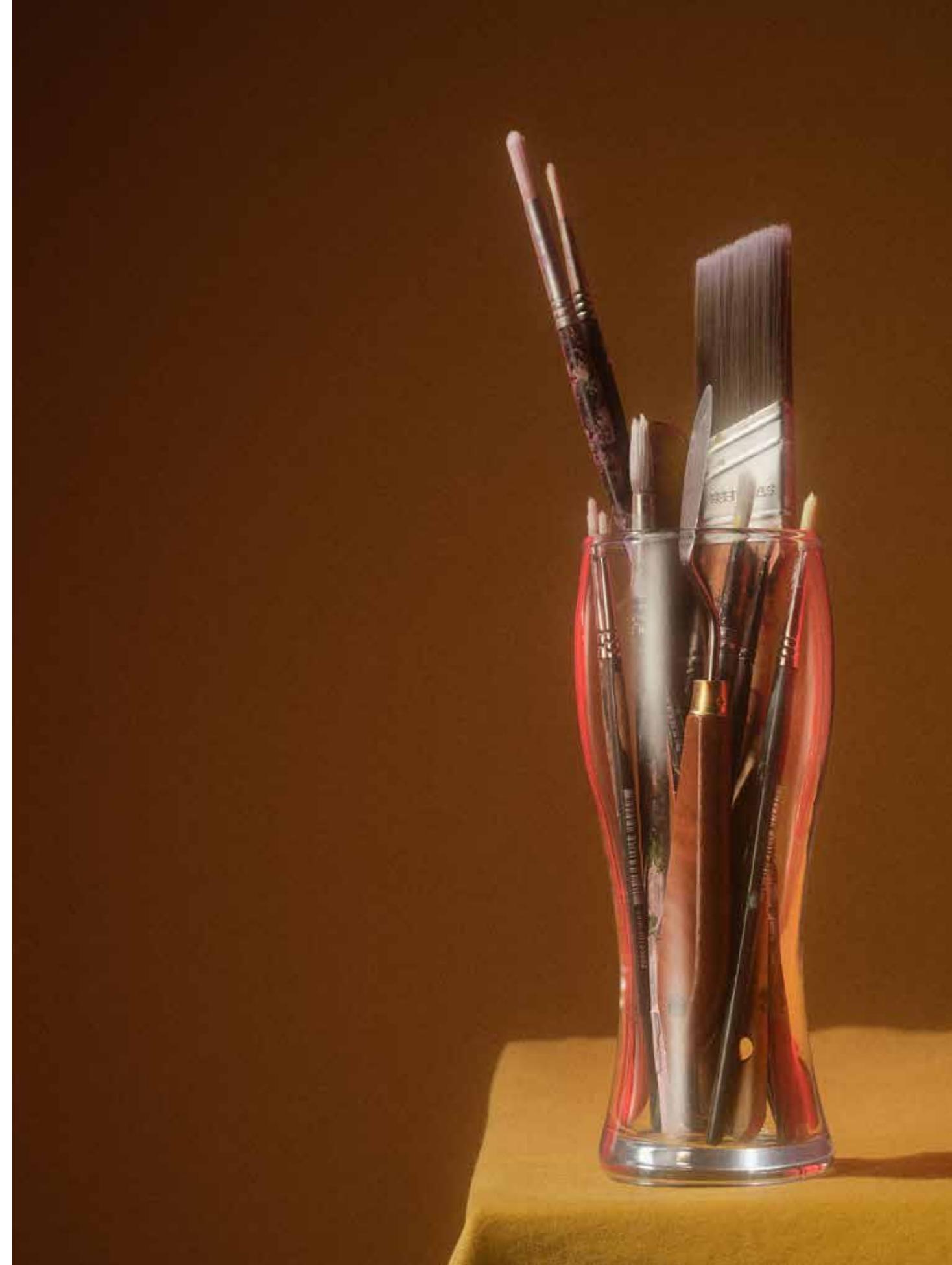
out that in Ontario and many parts of North America, 19th-century temperance movements, whose adherents regarded alcohol as a disruptive moral failing, successfully pushed for outright prohibition. Sobriety, he says, was the preoccupation of the striving Protestant middle classes, and favoured by neither working people nor the bourgeoisie.

Those views gave way after the Second World War to a medicalized disease model, as well as the grassroots efforts of Alcoholics Anonymous and its 12-step program. One promised a "cure," while the other advocated abstinence, but without judgment for those who fell off the wagon. Sobriety had become a treatment goal as opposed to a social practice. Yet, as Heron notes, "the attempt in the 1950s to say categorically that alcoholism is a sickness fell apart because they couldn't find characteristics that would be consistent across all alcoholics."

The current thinking, which has

matured over several decades, links substance use to mental health, social determinants and less rigid thinking about outcomes: sobriety if necessary, but not necessarily sobriety. Weobong says public health messaging plays a critical role on the prevention side. For those who've developed alcohol-use disorders, he points out that remission and recovery will take many forms besides going cold turkey, and can only succeed sustainably when individuals and their counsellors tackle the underlying issues, which range from childhood sexual abuse to living in an alcohol-saturated culture.

"The ultimate goal of therapy is going to be that I'd want you to actually go into a pub with your friends, and that you remain sober [while] your friends are drinking and you are not drinking. That is where the therapy is going to work towards, but it's a gradual process. Then you're able to build up, over time, the self-efficacy skills and resilience." ●



I am making a change

York partnership connects Black students with employers

**BY NEIL ARMSTRONG
PHOTOGRAPHY BY HORST HERGET**

Rianna Brown



RIANNA BROWN is enthusiastic about her job with the BlackNorth Initiative, where her responsibilities include examining the social media of the company, creating posts on its platforms and analyzing their social media growth. It is a bonus to her that the company is predominantly Black and represents Black excellence as she pursues her goal to work in corporate communications or public relations.

As a second-year Communication and Media Studies student, Brown says her program at York is mostly theory-based, so she appreciates the insight and



Chanée Dowdie

I've always said... I want to work with a company that has values that I also relate to or can understand

hands-on experience that she is gaining from this internship.

Created by a partnership of York University and TECHNATION's Black Excellence Program, Brown found out about the communications position from a posting on the Experience York portal. The BlackNorth Initiative supports Black entrepreneurs in Canada.

"I've always said ... I want to work with a company that has values that I also relate to or can understand," says Brown, who started her internship in February. "Working for this company and being behind a lot of the things that they do is very inspiring, and it shows that I am making a change – even in a position that I'm studying for," says Brown.

Through TECHNATION's Career Ready Program and a York University partnership to fund student hires for eligible companies, Chanée Dowdie (BA '17), creative innovator of One Empire Inc. and owner of Mississauga-based restaurant Honey Soul Food, hired a summer student in 2023.

For seven years, Dowdie was managing chain restaurants such as Swiss Chalet, Kelseys and Montana's, but with the

onset of the pandemic, she decided to leave and start her own business.

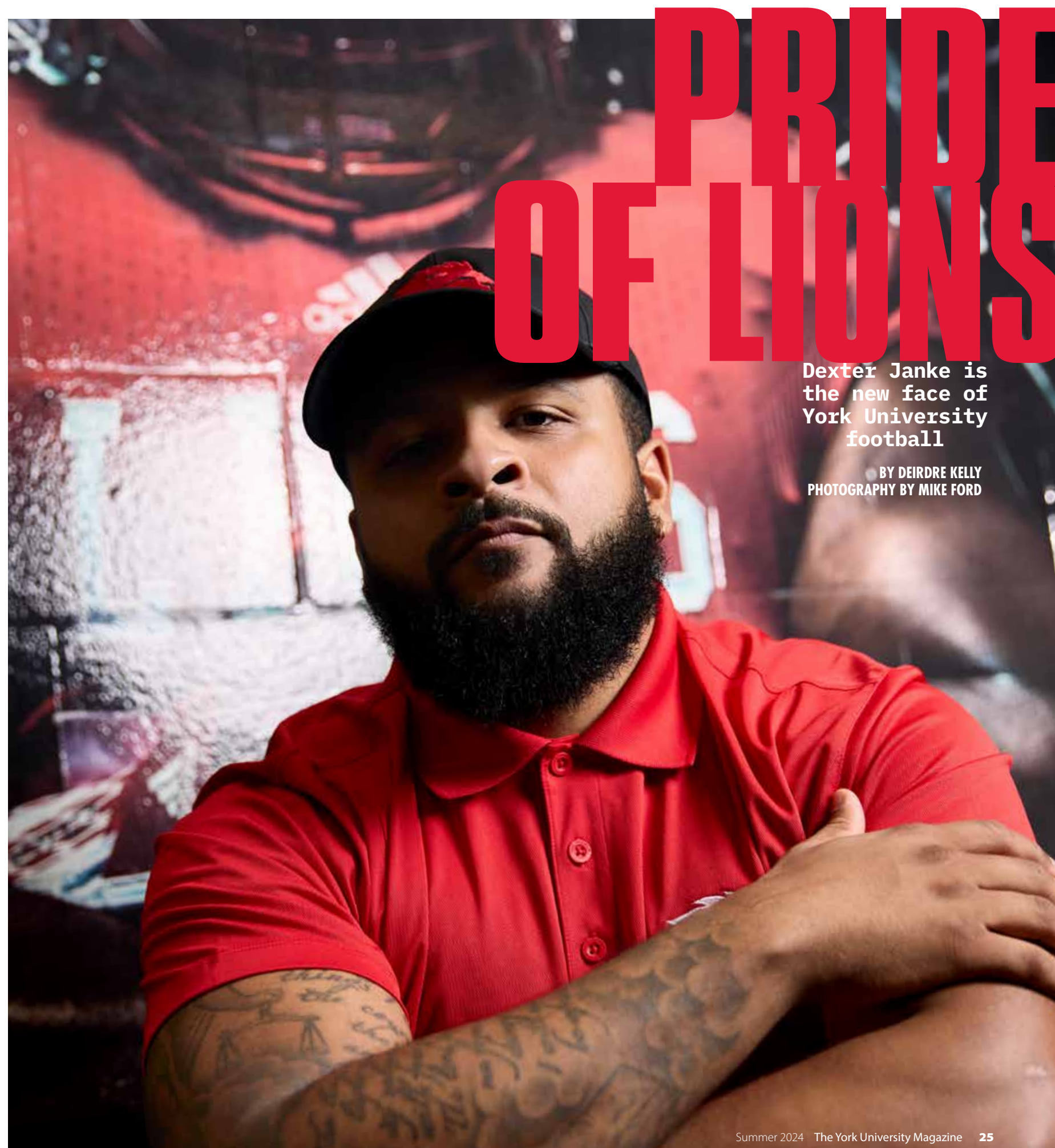
"It was time to just do it for myself, and it was really easy to transition because of my experience, but also because of my business major."

After opening the restaurant in April 2021, she said a series of connections, starting with the BlackNorth Initiative, eventually led to York University introducing her to TECHNATION's Career Ready Program.

"If I could do it again this year, I definitely would, because what I learned and the experience that my student-employee gained, it was amazing."

The program aims to create an equitable digital workforce by addressing systemic barriers and supporting Black student communities within Canada's tech sector, among other goals. It offers participating employers a talent pool of Black Excellence students enrolled at York University.

Dowdie has recommended the program to other CEOs she knows because "sometimes when it comes to staffing, especially staffing that represents our business, it can be hard to find." ●



PRIDE OF LIONS

Dexter Janke is the new face of York University football

BY DEIRDRE KELLY
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE FORD



FOCUS ON THE STRUCTURE, ON THE CULTURE, THEN THE RESULTS WILL COME

A **FORMER CANADIAN** Football League (CFL) player and Grey Cup winner, Dexter Janke is the new head football coach at York.

The 31-year-old Edmonton native brings a wealth of experience and a champion's mindset to the role, having served as the head coach of the Westshore Rebels last season. Under his leadership, the Rebels achieved a remarkable 12-1 record, reaching the Canadian Bowl before narrowly losing to the Saskatoon Hilltops.

Janke arrived at York in February, just when the Lions needed him most. The team has not posted more than three regular-season victories since 2002. Its last Ontario University Athletics playoff appearance dates back to 2004. He hopes to turn that around.

"This is a really exciting time," Janke says. "We have a great opportunity to reset the standard, come together as a group and bring a lot of pride and excitement to this program."

Named 2023's Canadian Junior Football League (CJFL) coach of the year, Janke entered coaching following a notable career in the CFL, where for four seasons he played as a defensive back, earning a Grey Cup ring with the Winnipeg Blue

Bombers in 2019. Prior to his professional career, Janke honed his skills at the University of Saskatchewan where, as a 6-foot tall, 220-pound running back, he was drafted by the Calgary Stampeders in 2015.

Beyond the football field, Janke has a diverse athletic background, having competed as a brakeman on Canada's four-man World Cup bobsleigh team in 2018. His multi-faceted experiences have shaped his coaching philosophy, which stresses teamwork, discipline and a relentless pursuit of excellence.

"My exposure to winning environments and high-level coaches prepared me well for this opportunity," Janke says. "My time as a professional athlete and student athlete provided me with the necessary perspective to relate to our student athletes' experience."

York is proud to have him.

"We are thrilled to welcome Dexter Janke to our department and the University," says York's Athletics & Recreation executive director Steven Chuang (MES '10). "Coach

Janke's core values align with our mission of delivering a world class student-athlete experience by transforming the lives of everyone that we touch – one Lion at a time."

Adds Athletics director Alex Dominato, "I could not be more excited to announce Dexter Janke as the next head football coach of the Lions. He is a proven winner and leader as a student athlete, professional player and head coach. His ability to bring everyone along for the journey was evident and special to all of our stakeholders."

Janke is now poised to take the Lions to new heights, instilling a sense of pride and excitement within the York University community. His younger brother, Jacob Janke (BCOM '20), played for the Lions as a York student, from 2015 to 2019, so he already has an idea of what is needed to take the team forward.

"I'm working hand in hand with the coaching staff to make sure we have a solid structure and foundation to build upon," Janke says. "We have to focus on the structure, on the culture, then the results will come." ●

As York University honours Jane Goodall's trail-blazing legacy, faculty who study primates recount the ways she influenced their lives and work

BY JOANNA THOMPSON
PHOTOGRAPHY BY GARY BEECHEY

HOW JANE GOODALL ROCKED THEIR WORLD

**I don't know if we would have been given
the same opportunities, as women.
So she really did pave the way**

JANE GOODALL stands tall among the giants of 20th-century science – a pioneer whose impact reverberates through the decades. From her groundbreaking studies on chimpanzee behaviour to her relentless advocacy for conservation, Goodall – who was recently awarded an honorary doctorate by York University – has shaped the course of scientific inquiry and environmental stewardship.

Now, at 90, her passion remains undiminished as she continues to criss-cross the globe, a tireless champion for our planet's future.

Goodall's influence extends far beyond academia, inspiring generations of researchers to follow in her footsteps. As the University prepared to celebrate her achievements at an April convocation ceremony held in downtown Toronto, professors Anne Russon, Valérie Schoof and Suzanne MacDonald reflected on the profound impact of her legacy and its enduring relevance.

FOR SUZANNE MACDONALD, Goodall's influence began informing her worldview from an early age. "I started a conservation club when I was nine because I was like, 'Jane Goodall is going to save the world,'" she recalls.

This initial seed blossomed into a career studying animal cognition. Her research has taken her from Canada to Kenya, studying primates both in captivity and the wild. And in the field of primatology, when it comes to Goodall's impact on her, "I don't think that I'm unusual in any way," she says.

Countless other women in science can trace their origin story back to Goodall.

Like many areas of science, primatology began as a field largely dominated by men. Today, it is one of the few STEM disciplines where women outnumber men. This paradigm shift was, in part, sparked by role models such as Goodall and her contemporaries, including legendary orangutan researcher Biruté Galdikas and gorilla specialist Dian Fossey. "I don't know if we would have been given the

same opportunities, as women," MacDonald says. "So she really did pave the way."

Goodall began researching wild chimpanzees in Tanzania in 1960. Armed with only a notebook, pencil, binoculars and whistle for protection, the 26-year-old spent months carefully observing the apes' daily lives. Her methods were, for the time, unorthodox. Rather than dryly assigning the chimps a number, Goodall gave them names and noted their individual personality quirks.

This unusual approach paid off. Over the course of her years of field work, Goodall became the first researcher to observe chimps using tools, building nightly nests and eating meat. Her success inspired other primatologists to take a similar track; today, many scientists employ a similar quiet, observational and holistic style of field work.

"When you just walk into the world of another species, you're in a much better situation to understand them than if they're locked up in a cell somewhere," says Anne Russon, executive director of the Borneo Orangutan Society of Canada and primatologist at York's Glendon Campus. "I think that's probably what [Goodall] discovered herself."

Russon, too, learned this lesson first-hand. She began venturing into the forests of Borneo in 1989, to study orangutan intelligence. Like Goodall, Russon carefully observed her subjects as individuals with their own preferences and personalities. Her research shed light on a huge range of great ape behaviours that were previously only attributed to humans, including the ability to pantomime. And though she no longer makes the gruelling journey to Borneo, she still recalls each orangutan she studied as vividly as the day they met.

Based on her experience, Russon believes that Goodall's gender also likely informed her unique scientific perspective. Her smaller stature may have made the chimpanzees less fearful of her presence compared to the larger, louder men they had encountered previously. And viewing chimp behaviour through a female lens may have enabled her to interpret behaviour that her male counterparts missed, such as female reproductive strategies. "I think it very much



changed the discussion," says Valérie Schoof, a behavioural endocrinologist at York's Glendon Campus.

Schoof encountered Goodall's work later in life. "I wasn't someone who was always enamoured with nature or anything like that," she recalls. Schoof originally intended to go into mathematics, until an animal behaviour course at Queen's University changed her mind. From there, she read several of Goodall's books and fell in love with non-human primates.

Now, as a mother, Schoof relates to Goodall's story in a whole new way. "I think about how brave she was to bring her family [to Tanzania] with her," she says. In the 1960s and '70s, women weren't expected – or encouraged – to go on working after giving birth. But after her son, Hugo, arrived in 1967, Goodall continued her research while simultaneously adapting to life as a parent. It was a gutsy move.

According to Schoof, Goodall has helped push the field toward a more equitable future in other ways. Primatology has a long, ugly history of colonialism – particularly in Africa, where most great ape research takes place. White, Western researchers have a history of parachuting into marginalized regions only to collect what information they want, and then leaving without a second glance. In recent years, however,

the discipline has been slowly reckoning with this exploitative past.

But throughout her career, Goodall has called for Western researchers to work together with Indigenous people in order to better understand local ecosystems. "She certainly has been an early advocate for the recognition that local people are critical to the conservation of nature," Schoof says.

That work continues through several organizations, including the Jane Goodall Institute's micro-grants for Indigenous youth, and Roots & Shoots, a conservation education program Goodall co-founded at the behest of 12 local teenagers in Tanzania in 1991. Today, Roots & Shoots works with passionate young people in more than 100 countries.

The future of conservation is more inclusive, diverse and co-operative than in the past. Which is good, because today's young researchers and activists face unprecedented ecological challenges. Between the ongoing climate crisis, biodiversity loss, deforestation and rising sea levels, the next generation needs all hands on deck – and Jane Goodall's legacy can provide a blueprint, inspiring them to push boundaries and seek new paradigms in their own work. "Without them," Schoof says, "there is no hope." ●

Alumni



Shine a Light

Arun Srinivasan bedazzles the stage with his lighting designs

BY DEIRDRE KELLY
PHOTOGRAPHY BY KAITLYN KRESTIANKOVA

ARUN SRINIVASAN (BFA '94) usually doesn't get top billing and doesn't get applause. But he's the reason so many of Canada's dance performances and shows command attention. As one of the country's leading lighting designers, he plays a role as crucial as that of any director or actor. Srinivasan doesn't just illuminate a production. He shapes and frames it, easing the transitions between scenes and the narrative potential of the overall visual presentation.

"It's easy to make things look cool with light, but that's not what I want to do," Srinivasan says. "I'm there to support the story, the mood, the moving bodies onstage. I'm there to help the audience see what it needs to see."

The recipient of 10 Dora Mavor Moore nominations for his work in dance, theatre and opera, he has lit shows at Soulpepper, Crow's Theatre, Canadian Stage and Factory Theatre. He has also served as resident lighting designer at York's Theatre and Dance departments, among other Faculties. Srinivasan's additional dance credentials encompass collaborations with such York-educated performers and choreographers as Yvonne Ng

(MA '18, BFA '87), Lata Pada (MA '96) and Peter Chin (BFA '85).

Currently, Srinivasan is at the Stratford Festival, lighting the North American premiere production of *Wendy and Peter Pan*. This is his fourth season at Stratford, where last year he received critical acclaim for the lighting design he did for *Love's Labour's Lost*. The *Globe and Mail* said "his gradually dimming lighting design" enhanced the production. This year promises to be just as noteworthy.

"This new show has so many elements that I enjoy – multiple sets, choreography and actors who fly. This will be my first time lighting people in the air and I'm so excited. I just love all the bells and whistles. I do like bold lighting."

Very much a butterfly of the theatre, Srinivasan is drawn to bright lights. He remembers the first time they made a life-altering impression on him, while attending Albert Campbell Collegiate in Toronto's Scarborough district. This is where he – the son of South Asian immigrants from India – grew up, along with an older sister also involved in the arts. Srinivasan had joined his high



school's sound and lighting crew, primarily performing grunt work such as assembling and hanging gels and lights for assemblies and school shows.

However, it wasn't until an inspiring high school teacher, Jane Deluzio, took him and his classmates to see *The Phantom of the Opera* in downtown Toronto that he realized there was more to lighting than mere technical tasks. That school trip included a backstage tour of the entire production, including the dramatic lighting design. "I saw that and I was hooked," he says. "I went back to my school and I didn't just light our final show. I took it over. I meticulously designed it, light by light. I knew then that that's what I wanted to do with my life."

He enrolled at York after high school, because of the reputation of its Theatre Department, and focused on lighting as part of a multi-faceted education in the performing arts. "I loved it," he says. "The program at York exposed us to everything, from sets to costumes and lighting, of course, which is what I knew I would concentrate on."

Post graduation, Srinivasan volunteered at local theatres, where he apprenticed for free to hone his skills. He also gave freely of his time at a Toronto dance festival, where he quickly earned a following, eventually lighting the shows of several prominent Canadian choreographers, among them Danny Grossman, a former York faculty member, and Robert Desrosiers, a former ballet dancer who went on to helm his own contemporary dance company.

Srinivasan's seamless collaboration with Desrosiers led to an extraordinary level of trust, with the choreographer granting him complete artistic freedom to craft the visually stunning lighting designs that became a hallmark of Desrosiers Dance Theatre's critically acclaimed performances.

"I became known as the lighting designer for dance, which I didn't mind even though my original plan was to light theatre. I love big-budget shows, I will admit. But dance is different. The budgets tend to be much smaller and the work is a shorter duration. But there's also so much beauty and creativity there. And I've learned a lot lighting dance, where unlike in theatre, the lighting isn't as much overhead as directed from the sides, which is a whole other challenge."

Slowly, as the accolades for his dance work mounted, theatre came calling, which is how he ended up at Strat-

The program at York exposed us to everything, from sets to costumes and lighting, of course, which is what I knew I would concentrate on

ford for the first time in 2020. "I didn't contact them, they contacted me and at first I was shocked. I always wanted to be at Stratford where there's so much artistic freedom. The first word whenever you ask if you could do something new is never 'no.' It's more, 'let's see what we can do.'"

After Stratford, Srinivasan heads to Sweden, where he'll do a residency for *No Woman's Land*, a 2023 show by Toronto's Jaber Dance Theatre. Srinivasan did the original lighting design, but for the European premiere, taking place outside Stockholm on Sept. 7 (and the anticipated European tour that may follow), he's handing it over to a local designer to implement and manage, in accordance with his detailed instructions.

Teaching others how to do lighting is something he's grown accustomed to, having served as an instructor for lighting design at York and elsewhere.

"I always tell students that we're painting with light," he says. "I also tell them not to over-dazzle, because sometimes less is more. If the lighting is ever the star of a show, then we haven't done the job right." ●



A NOVEL APPROACH

York writer-in-residence
Shyam Selvadurai writes the future

BEFORE HE BECAME an award-winning author and screenwriter, Shyam Selvadurai (BFA '89) was a theatre major at York who couldn't imagine that one day he'd become an internationally acclaimed writer whose work champions diversity and inclusion. Not that he hadn't thought of it.

But as a gay person of colour who immigrated to Canada in the wake of the 1983 race riots that had ravaged his native Sri Lanka, he couldn't see how he could penetrate the country's then predominantly white, straight literary scene. His creative writing professor, Matthew Corrigan, helped to open his eyes.

"He believed that the next generation of great Canadian writers would come from racialized minority communities," recalls Selvadurai during a recent conversation. "It was the first time I had ever heard that, and I felt invited in, not as a token, but as someone who might have something to contribute." And contribute he has.

In the 25 years since he graduated from York, Selvadurai has published seven internationally acclaimed novels, among them 1994's *Funny Boy* (a Books in Canada First Novel winner that in 2020 became a film by Deepa Mehta),

2005's *Swimming in the Monsoon Sea* (which took a Lambda best children's and youth literature award), and 2015's *The Hungry Ghosts* (a Governor General's Literary Award nominee). He has also edited a collection of short stories, *Story-Wallab: Short Fiction from South Asian Writers*, that includes contributions from Salman Rushdie and Hanif Kureishi, among other notable diasporic writers.

Even as his career flourishes, Selvadurai finds time to give back. In the spring, he expanded his influence by taking on the role of the Jack McClelland Writer-in-Residence at the University of Toronto. This recent opportunity to engage with students complemented his previous tenure as writer-in-residence at York University during the fall and winter terms. As part of his duties, Selvadurai hosted non-credit fiction and creative non-fiction workshops for interested students, bringing his wealth of experience to inspire and guide aspiring writers. He will once again mentor students during the intensive week-long Summer Workshop in Creative Writing at the Humber School of Writers, starting in June.

Currently immersed in crafting a fantasy novel for young adults, Selvadurai remains deeply connected to the aspirations of the next generation. Reflecting on the pivotal guidance he received from Corrigan, he is committed to sharing invaluable advice with students who harbour their own literary ambitions, ensuring they are equipped to navigate their creative journeys with confidence and purpose.

"As [the 19th-century poet] Khalil Gibran says, the next generation are the arrows into the future; we are merely the bows. That's how I see myself," Selvadurai insists. "I don't want to influence how students think. It is for them to do that and for me to encourage their ability by sharing with them my craft and my experience as a writer." ●
— Deirdre Kelly

Classes

1976

CHAPNICK, SANDRA
(LLB '76, OSGOOD HALL)

Earlier this year, Sandra was named a member of the Order of Canada in recognition of her distinguished legal career and contributions to society. Her 2024 memoir, *BOLD DECISIONS - Memoirs of a Judge, Lawyer, Teacher and Working Mom*, provides a candid account of her experiences at Osgoode Hall Law School and the challenges she navigated in balancing her personal and professional life as a mother of four.

Achievement Award for his scholarship, teaching and service in the field of rural criminology.

1993

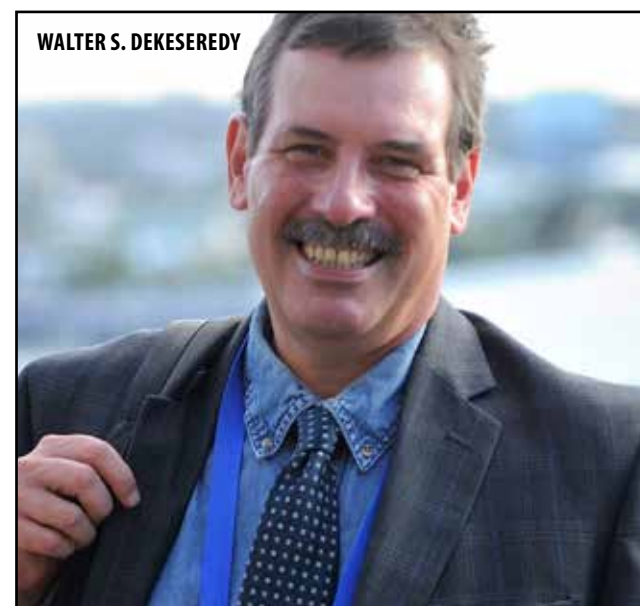
MELCHIOR, LISA
(MBA '93, BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION)
Lisa has been a successful private equity investor for more than 25 years, and has global investing expertise in enterprise software. She is the founder and manager partner of Vertu Capital, a technology private equity fund supporting the growth of the Canadian tech ecosystem.



ADEBE DERANGO-ADEM

1982

DEKESEREDY, WALTER S.
(BA '82, MA '84, PHD '88, SOCIOLOGY)
Walter is a sociology professor who in 2023 received the American Society of Criminology's Ralph Weisheit Lifetime



WALTER S. DEKESEREDY

1997

BARATA, PEDRO
(BA '97, SOCIOLOGY)
Pedro has been named the new president and CEO of Habitat for

Humanity Canada. Prior to this, he held leadership roles at organizations including United Way Greater Toronto, the Atkinson Foundation, and the Future Skills Centre, a hub dedicated to supporting job seekers and employers in the evolving job market.

2004

RICCIUTI, ANGELA
(BA '04, PSYCHOLOGY)
Angela has been appointed as the new executive director of A Place Called Home. This position continues her strong commitment to improving service delivery and advocating for individuals with disabilities.

2007

ACQUISTO, STELLA
(BA '07, POLITICAL SCIENCE)
Stella has been working with CityNews since 2011. She began her career as a traffic reporter and is now a weather specialist and journalist for the channel.

2008

DERANGO-ADEM, ADEBE
(BA '08, MA '09, ENGLISH)
Adebe is a writer whose work has been published in *The Claremont Review*, *CV2*, the *Toronto Star*, *Room Magazine* and the online literary journal *Cosmonauts Avenue*. Her recent book, *Vox Humana*, won the 2023 Raymond Souster Award from the League of Canadian Poets.



BRENDAN WEAVER

2009

WEAVER, BRENDAN
(BDES '09, GRAPHIC DESIGN)
After graduating from York's Department of Design in 2009, Brendan founded Underdog Studio Ltd., recognized by the *Globe and Mail* as one of Canada's Top Growing Companies. In 2023, he established a \$25,000 annual scholarship for third-year design students at York.

2010

POURZAND, LILY
(BA '07, WOMEN'S STUDIES, LLM '10, LAW)
Lily came to Canada as an asylum seeker from Iran at age 24. Since law school, she has been providing services to women, children and immigrants, becoming a leader in social services in York Region.

2013

GRANT, DOMANIQUE
(BA '13, INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT STUDIES)
Domanique leads Grant Creativity Inc., a BIPOC-owned, female-led, Canadian social enterprise dedicated to increasing access and development for equity-seeking groups through wellness- and entertainment-based programming.

2014

STRAITTON, BRITTANY
(MBA '14, BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION)
Brittany is vice-president of forecasting, replenishment and planning at the Canadian Tire Corporation, Ltd. She is responsible for the correct timing of the \$11-billion flow of goods from vendors to Canadian Tire stores at the right quantities.

2015

ATIZADO, ROCHELLE
(MPIA '15, PUBLIC & INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS)
Rochelle is a senior adviser, partnerships and special initiatives, at the United Nations Foundation, and is also a UN-published writer.

2016

SHOOK, ESTELLE
(MFA '16, THEATRE)
Estelle earned her MFA in theatre through a collaborative program between York University and Canadian Stage. Since 2016, she has been artistic director of Caravan Farm Theatre, a professional outdoor theatre company located on an 80-acre farm near Armstrong, B.C.

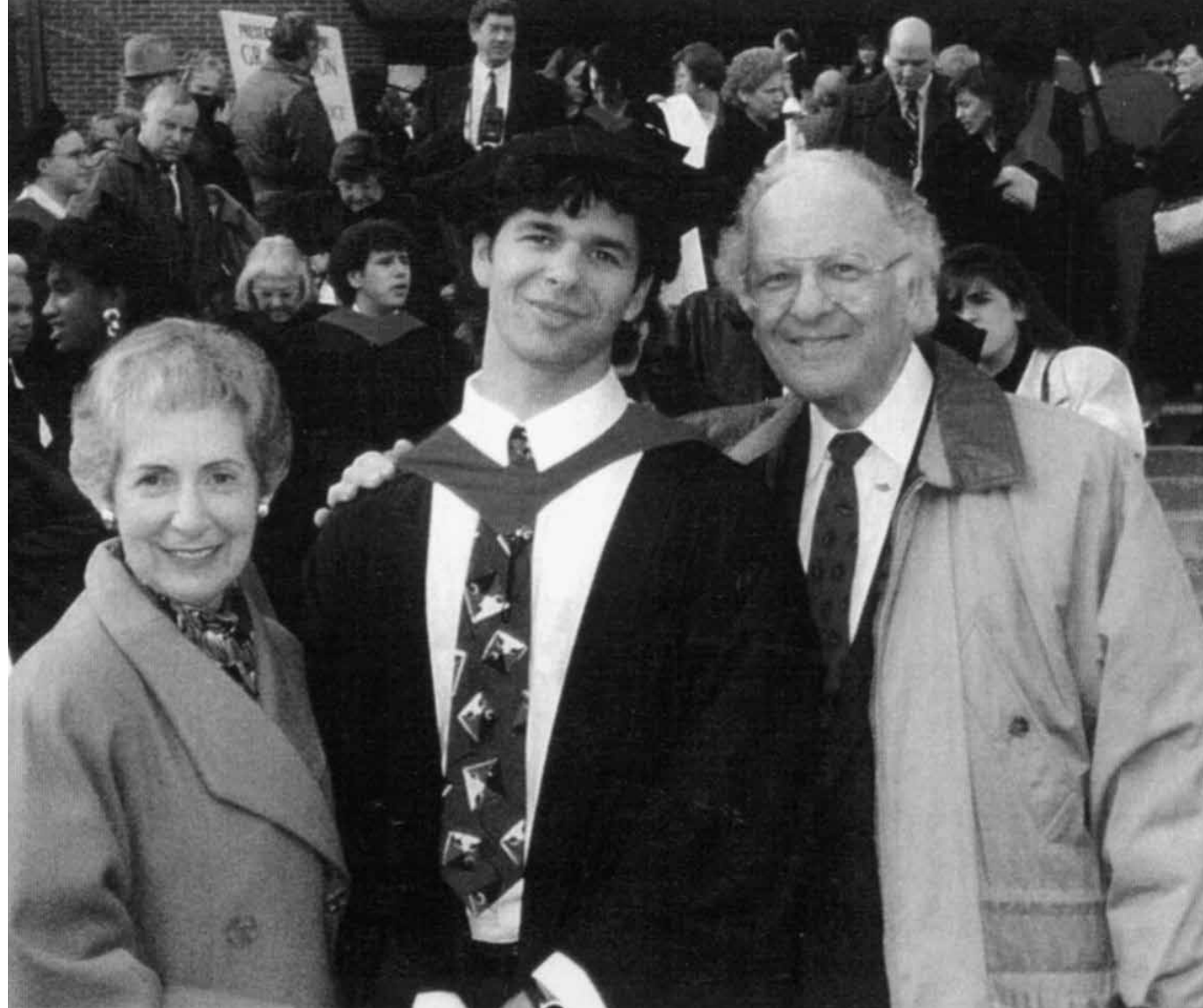
IN MEMORIAM

SMITH MACDONALD PODNIEKS, ELIZABETH
(MES '83, ENVIRONMENTAL & URBAN CHANGE)
Elizabeth, a renowned advocate for elder-abuse prevention, passed away peacefully in Toronto, on Feb. 2, 2024. She founded several organizations dedicated to protecting vulnerable older adults, and was a member of the Order of Canada.



Want to be in Classes?

Send us your photos and news.
Email us at magnotes@yorku.ca



Flashback

Have a great photo from your days at York?

Email us at magnotes@yorku.ca

MY 1992 GRADUATION CEREMONY at York University was a triple win. Not only was I receiving my hard-earned BA in math for commerce, that day I was also getting to share the spotlight with two Canadian music legends – jazz great Oscar Peterson, then York’s chancellor, who conferred the degree, and my grandfather, Lou Applebaum, a pioneering cultural force who had been teaching music composition at York just a few years before. My grandfather was my inspiration and the reason I ended up working in the music industry in various capacities – including as comptroller and artist manager for PolyGram records – just a couple years after this photo was taken of me and both grandparents at convocation. I grew up backstage, watching my grandfather organizing orchestras and composing music for the Stratford Festival, the National Arts Centre in Ottawa, Roy Thomson Hall and the Bluma Appel Theatre in Toronto, to name just a few. I experienced first-hand the work needed to make a difference, and it made an impact on me. My career today is as a wealth advisor, and I still keep up an active interest in music and the arts. My education – both in and outside the classroom, saw to that. — *Jordan Applebaum*



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