

Pomona

COLLEGE MAGAZINE

Fall 2026

Originals

THE CAMPAIGN FOR
POMONA COLLEGE

On the Move

Students performing as a “movement choir” in Berlin as part of the Pomona College Global Gateways course, Experiential History: Movement Upon Movement in the Weimar Republic. This was the capstone of a week learning how expressionist dance pioneer Rudolf Laban developed the art form. Using Berlin and smaller German cities such as Potsdam, Dessau and Wuppertal as living classrooms, students explored architecture, visual arts, history, silent film, literature, cabaret and performing arts throughout the country.



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POMONA COLLEGE

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On the cover, Lexi Duffy '26 and fellow members of Pomona's Mock Trial share a quiet moment savoring *Dividing the Light*, the Skyspace by James Turrell '65 that is perhaps the most glowing example of public art on the Pomona College campus.

For Duffy, Pomona has opened doors far beyond her hometown of Milford, Iowa. A public policy analysis major, Duffy used Pomona's Summer Undergraduate Research Program (SURP) to pursue historical research related to economic biases in American politics. She then traveled outside the U.S. for the first time to study social policy at University College Dublin, supported in part by a Gilman Scholarship. Now, she is a California Capital Fellow, studying the legal system firsthand, an opportunity she discovered through Pomona's Career Development Office.

Photo by Michael Branscom

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magazine.pomona.edu

Stray Thoughts

This fall we're celebrating originals.

Original thinking—one of the hallmarks of this singular place—is at the heart of

Originals: The Campaign for Pomona College, an ambitious fundraising campaign to enrich and sustain the College for generations of Sagehens to come.

You can read more about *Originals* in this issue's special section (page 25), and I encourage you to do so.

What makes a thing original has also been very much top of mind for our editorial team as we contemplated our feature stories for the magazine.

In "What's the Big Idea?" we cast our eyes back over decades of Pomona history to lift up a dozen (or so) true originals who came up with brilliant ideas and had the talent, tenacity and all-around gumption to turn those gems into transformative realities—be it an Avery label, a windsurfer or a bengal cat (see page 33 for more genius inventions).

We're pretty sure there are scores more Sagehens out there who have changed the world—or at least a corner of it—for the better through next level creative thinking and extraordinary powers of collaborative problem solving.

Have you crossed paths with a fellow alum who fits that description to a T? We'd love to hear about them. Send me a note!

—Judy Hill
editor-in-chief
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Write to Us at PCM

Pomona College Magazine welcomes brief letters to the editor. Write to us at pcm@pomona.edu or mail a letter to **Pomona College Magazine, 550 N. College Ave., Claremont, CA 91711**. Letters are selected for publication based on relevance and available space and may be edited for brevity and clarity.

Quoted

"When young people disengage from politics, it is seldom about apathy. It is more often driven by the quiet conviction that their concerns are being swept aside. Offering students roles in these conversations, as questioners and organizers and citizens, is one of the most direct ways to counter that drift."

G. Gabrielle Starr, Pomona College president, on why colleges must bring political debates back to campuses. Southern California News Group (*Press Enterprise*)

"Unfortunately, the costs of this fleeting spectral wonder are high, borne by negative consequences for our environment and our health."

Char Miller, W.M. Keck Professor of Environmental Analysis and History, arguing the case against fireworks, in *Time* magazine.

"It's not only that Gen Z has lost faith in Big Tech. In the face of galloping economic inequality and democratic backsliding, many now view tech titans as greed-fueled latter-day barons of capitalism."

Mark Andrejevic, professor of media studies, on why college students are right to turn against the tech elites, in *The Hechinger Report*.

Read All About It

We got several responses to our call in the last issue of *PCM* asking Sagehens to tell us about their first-year class book (pre-2003). This is what we know so far (and who told us):

1961
The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution
by C.P. Snow
(Svata M. Louda '65)

or
Memoirs of Hadrian
by Marguerite Yourcenar
(Candy Reiter Midkiff '65)

1963
The Secret Agent
by Joseph Conrad (Judith Grammel Evans '68)

1967
No first-year read
(Peter V. Huisking '71)

1974
No first-year read
(Diane Mayfield '78)

1978-1979
No first-year read
(Margo Tanenbaum '82, Jack Mearns '83)

1996
Palace Walk
by Naguib Mahfouz
(Kelly Nord '99, Shauna Pellauer '00)

1997
The English Patient
by Michael Ondaatje
(Alex Cho '01)

1998
Life on the Color Line: The True Story of a White Boy Who Discovered He Was Black
by Gregory Howard Williams
(Vanessa Kettner '02, J. Speidel '02)



You can read extra recollections by some of our respondents in the Class Notes section. Meanwhile, we'd love to keep filling in the gaps. So, whether you did or didn't have a first-year read, send us a note at pcm@pomona.edu.

Remembering Rev. Gordon Verplank

I was saddened to read in *PCM* of the death of Rev. Gordon Verplank '62 in September 2024. He was a very fine person and someone who had a major impact on Pomona and the other Claremont Colleges as College chaplain from the late 1960s through the 1970s.

Rev. Verplank, or Gordon as I and other students knew him, started as the Colleges' chaplain during the height of the Vietnam War. He helped organize protests against the war and became the administrator for the Claremont Colleges Draft Counseling Center, working with countless students faced with the difficult decision of whether to enlist, wait to be drafted, become a conscientious objector or go to Canada. It's safe to say that his work saved many young lives.

Gordon was also the driving force in expanding the chaplaincy from being solely a Protestant ministry to including both a Catholic priest and a Jewish rabbi as co-leaders with him.

I came to know Gordon my last two years at Pomona when he learned that I was doing a double major in political science and religion. It was Gordon Verplank who challenged me to "come out as a Christian," not in terms of sexual expression, but to quit letting other people define what being Christian meant. For Gordon, that meant caring about this world and its peoples, standing up for justice and working for peace. "If you think that's what is important in life," he said, "then don't let other people get the last word about what being Christian means."

I know from other classmates that he played a similar role in their vocational decisions. Both Pomona College and this world were well-served by Rev. Gordon Verplank.

—Rev. Talitha Arnold '75
The United Church of Santa Fe

Correction for Summer 2026 Issue

In "Where's the most random place you've met a fellow Sagehen?" (Page 57), Meta Valentic's graduation year was mistakenly listed as 1990. Meta actually graduated in 1994.



Class of '58 Zoomers

In the early months of the COVID pandemic, when isolation was beginning to take its toll, Frank LaHorgue '58 came up with the idea of gathering the Pomona Class of 1958 together in a Zoom meeting. Enlisting the help of a few others, he invited everyone in our class to the first meeting in the spring of 2020. Six years later, we're still meeting every month.

Our meetings, which are planned by a committee, consist of a presentation followed by lively discussions. Subject matter has been varied, ranging from slide shows of our reunions to reprises of significant events from our careers to presentations by classmates ("Starting a Coffee Plantation in Panama") and professors from Pomona College and other institutions ("Artificial Intelligence in Today's Classrooms"). We have learned about the complexities and uses of seaweed, about the psychological problems of military personnel conducting remote missile and drone attacks, about the cultural and political history that makes China what it is, and about the history of

the Gabrielino/Tongva Nation in Trojoatngna (aka, Claremont).

To plan and organize our monthly gatherings, a committee of eight classmates—two of whom have Zoom Pro licenses—meet weekly on Zoom. At these meetings we generate ideas for presentations, which often include taking advantage of contacts from the "outside world." We send out announcements a week before the presentation, and, a few minutes before the meeting, we send a link. We use the Zoom record function to distribute the meeting for classmates unable to attend.

Our meetings have not only enriched our lives intellectually but have proven to be a tremendous bonding experience for our class as we renew old friendships and create new ones. We've also found that our gatherings have amplified our ties to Pomona College and engendered feelings of gratitude for being among its graduates.

—Patrick Muffler '58
Connie Leas '58

Khalab Blagburn '27 Named a Beinecke Scholar

When Khalab Blagburn '27 won a \$35,000 Beinecke Scholarship this spring to support his graduate education, the cognitive science and mathematics double major became the first Pomona student since 2013 to receive the prize, which is awarded annually to outstanding juniors throughout the country in the social sciences, arts and humanities.

"I'm thankful and the recognition is great," Blagburn says, "but the financial support is amazing and a testament to the people around me, the opportunities I've pursued and the work I've put in."

At Pomona, Blagburn began working in the lab of Eric Hurley, professor of psychological science and Africana studies, as a sophomore, and was soon running point on a project about verve—the level, intensity and variability of immediate and environmental sensate simulation a person prefers and in which they are able to function optimally—in African American culture.

Blagburn says he has used a childhood fascination with optical illusions and magic to "pivot toward education, examining how students' perceived social conditions shape psychological constructs like achievement motivation and sense of belonging, which, in turn, influence academic outcomes."

A right back on the Sagehens men's soccer team, Blagburn plans to earn a Ph.D. in education with a focus on educational psychology.

"I'm interested in conducting social psychological interventions to support underserved and minoritized students," he says. "Then after my Ph.D., I'm eager to work within or with academic institutions to lead program development, curriculum development, and to make sure those students are being met where they need support."



News Briefs

New College Registrar

Lindsay Stadler has been selected as the College's new registrar after serving in the role on an interim basis for almost a year. Stadler earned her bachelor's from Claremont McKenna College and master's from Claremont Graduate University. "I have been around The Claremont Colleges the vast majority of my adult life," says Stadler, who started at Pomona in 2022 as associate registrar of operations. "I feel I've grown up professionally here, and I'm really fortunate to have such supportive and collaborative colleagues in registrar's offices around the consortium."

At the Humanities Studio

With the Humanities Studio's much-lauded founding director Kevin Dettmar stepping down from his role last spring, the studio, which fosters interdisciplinary study of the humanities among Pomona students and faculty, is now headed up by Tomás Summers Sandoval Jr., a professor of history and Chicana/o Latina/o studies. Sandoval's teaching and research focuses on Latine populations in the United States and he is currently at work on a book examining the history of Latinos in relation to the U.S. war in Vietnam.



Board of Trustees Elects Four New Members

Four newly elected members of the Board of Trustees began their term on July 1. **Justice Halim Dhanidina (Ret.) '94**, **Robi Ganguly '00** and **Cosimo H. J. Thawley '11** are Pomona alumni. **Bill Riley** is the parent of a 2026 graduate.

"Trustees play a vital role in the leadership of the College," says Geoff Pearson, secretary to the board. "They ensure that the College maintains its academic excellence and

long-term sustainability through the strategic direction and fiduciary oversight they provide." Dhanidina is dean of the Western State College of Law and was the first Muslim judge in California when appointed to the Los Angeles County Superior Court in 2012.

Ganguly began his two-year term as president of the College's Alumni Association Board in July. A co-founder of the software company Apptentive, he now invests in and

advises early startups and coaches CEOs of new ventures.

Riley recently chaired the College's Family Leadership Council. He is a partner at Twin City Dealerships in Knoxville, Tennessee, and was board president for the Knoxville Symphony Orchestra.

Thawley is an assistant secretary for the Australian Treasury Department, currently serving as the country's minister-counsellor and senior treasury representative to China.



Student Spotlight Elle Hawthorne '29

Hometown

Wilton, Connecticut

Intended Major

Double major in geology and environmental analysis

Peak Pomona Experience:

Participating in a one-month oceanographic research cruise from San Diego to Hawaii to study the role of nutrients in the ocean.

How it happened: I took an Intro to Geology class taught by Professor Maria Prokopenko, with a focus on oceanography. One day she mentioned she would be at sea for a month doing research this summer in the North Pacific. I went up to her after class and asked if she was looking to take any students. She was!

Onboard: There were scientists and grad students from the University of New Hampshire, University of Minnesota, Texas A&M, USC and Scripps Institute of Oceanography at UC Diego. Charlotte Renner PZ '27 and I were the only undergrads.

A typical day: We would start sampling water around 7 a.m. and wrap up close to 8 p.m. When we were traveling to another station, it was more relaxed, and our only responsibility was to collect samples of surface water every four hours. On those days, we got to do recreational activities like fishing. One of the crew members was from Hawaii and she gave us lessons in hula and Hawaiian culture.

Takeaway #1: There were a couple of times where people would notice something interesting in the water and say, 'OK, let's go run an experiment.' I thought that excitement and willingness to explore things they didn't understand was really cool.

Takeaway #2: At the beginning I felt nervous and didn't ask too many questions. As I became more comfortable, when something confused me, I would talk to people, and sometimes it turned out they didn't understand it either. Asking questions benefited everyone because then we had more things to explore and discuss.

Takeaway #3: I learned just how much we don't know about the ocean. I was reminded how vast and important it is.

By the numbers: Charlotte and I did a tally of how many liters of water we filtered to see how much we had accomplished. We estimated around 2,600 liters.

Post-Pomona: This experience has solidified my interest in geology and made me consider going to grad school for oceanography. A lot of the time I was there, I was thinking I could totally see myself doing this as a career, so that's a great insight to have.



Out in the Open

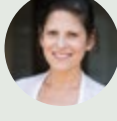
If you’ve walked past the Benton Museum of Art recently, you may have noticed a striking yellow-and-black sculpture on display in the courtyard that faces College Avenue. Chris Burden ’69 originally designed the piece, *Untitled* (2011), as a student project at Pomona, but it wasn’t fabricated until 2011, the year that the Pomona College Museum of Art (now the Benton) opened the exhibition *It Happened at Pomona*. For that show the museum’s staff worked with Burden to complete the work. After the exhibition closed, the sculpture lived in Lyon Court outside Montgomery Art Hall until 2020, when it was moved to the new Benton building to inaugurate the John and Debbie Starr Family Sculpture Patio. Now, six years later, museum staff have reinstalled *Untitled* in the John and Louise Bryson Courtyard, where visitors can engage with it “in the round,” on all of its four sides.

Faculty Retirements

- 

Richard McKirahan
Professor of Classics and Philosophy
53 Years at Pomona
- 

Sharon Hou
Associate Professor of Chinese
45 Years at Pomona
- 

Samuel Yamashita
Professor of History
43 Years at Pomona
- 

Grace Dávila-López
Adjunct Professor of Romance Languages and Literatures
31 Years at Pomona
- 

Nicole Weekes
Professor of Psychological Science and professor of neuroscience
28 Years at Pomona

A Break From Screen Time

On a late Friday afternoon on Marston Quad, a group of students are seated on blankets munching on snacks, shuffling cards for a game of Egyptian Rat Slap and sharing insights from a class discussion.

A second group starts a game of spikeball as other students stretch out to work on *The Student Life* newspaper’s crossword puzzle. No one is scrolling. There’s not a smartphone in sight.

Welcome to the weekly meeting of The Luddite Club, which for the past year has promoted a healthy approach to technology for Pomona College students and others at The Claremont Colleges.

The idea for the club “actually came from a *New York Times* article that I read my sophomore year,” says co-founder Kaitlyn Ulalisa ’27, a politics and French major. “I was very, very, very heavily addicted to social media and my phone at one point in high school and a little bit into college. Then I got rid of everything.”

Ulalisa joined forces with Abhi Namala PZ ’27, a computer science major, to start the club. He too wanted what he calls a screen “detox” and a place to unwind with fellow students who also were holding themselves accountable in the “attention economy.”

The meetings have no concrete structure. Each week, the leaders bring a red wagon filled with snacks, cards, arts and crafts supplies and balls of various types. “Then we lay out blankets, and people come,” says Ulalisa. “Every week—same time, same place—so people know where to find us.”



Staff Spotlight

Jillian Gomez, Farm Manager

Hidden away in the far southeast corner of campus, the Pomona College Organic Farm is home to a native plant garden, a composting system, lush fruit orchards and 50 beds of vegetable crops, as well as a small flock of friendly chickens.

Since 2021 Jillian Gomez has overseen the farm, which offers students, faculty and staff of the 5Cs a hands-on education in small-scale ecological farming.



Why should folks visit? It’s just a beautiful space and it’s good for people’s mental health to come out here and take a break. It’s also great for learning about nature and sustainable agriculture and land management. Beyond that, we want the broader community to be involved as much as possible—we recently had a soil fest here put on by a local organization. People are surprised this exists in the middle of Claremont.

How are students involved? We have a compost crew, which is usually about five students, and farm assistants—we had seven or so last semester. Students tend to come back each year. I think people who are drawn to work with the farm tend to stick around and get really committed.

A typical day? Every day is different. It always starts with going around checking on things. How is the compost doing? How are the bees doing? How is the pond doing? A student installed the pond as her senior project to create a habitat for native frogs. So, I’ll check on that. It’s part of my job to make room for students to have ideas and try stuff.

The fun parts? I love being outside. I learned early on that I wasn’t cut out for indoor office work. I love to be outdoors. I like problem solving and there are so many opportunities for little improvements and big improvements.

The biggest challenge? Number one is squirrels. They eat everything. The ground

squirrels are a native species, so they’re supposed to be here, but their population is way out of control. It’s especially bad in the summer, when the juveniles are coming out of the burrows. The population triples or quadruples depending on how big the litters are.

What’s new? The compost program is always a big thing. In the past couple of years, we’ve been trying to expand the percentage of food waste we take from the dining halls. At the same time, we’re dealing with new and emerging pest issues. This summer I’ve been trying to figure out how can we secure the compost from the coyotes, who have suddenly shown an interest in getting into those food sources. [PCM](#)

Community Through Compost



On a small island off the Washington coast, Lina McRoberts '27 learned larger lessons about community and sustainability.

By Judy Hill

On a typical afternoon this past July, a visitor to Midnight's Farm on Lopez Island off the coast of Washington state might have spotted Lina McRoberts '27 harvesting rhubarb, trellising Swiss chard or sticking a temperature probe into a steaming pile of compost.

A physics and gender and women's studies double major, McRoberts spent 10 weeks living and working at the farm for her Summer Undergraduate Research Program (SURP) project, through an internship with the Lopez Community Land Trust. Alongside daily hands-on farmwork, McRoberts drew on her physics knowledge to understand and improve the farm's community composting system.

Composting is fascinating, says McRoberts, because while it is a biological, chemical and physical process, it also

is a stewardship practice that transforms waste—brought to the farm by Lopez Island residents—into a shared community resource that is sold back to local farms, restaurants, gardens and community members. “Nutrients circulate, quite literally, through the island,” she says.

On the technical side, McRoberts wanted to know how airflow, temperature, moisture and microbial activity interact within large compost piles. Because the microbial activity driving decomposition occurs largely out of sight within piles that can reach 8 feet in height, temperature serves as one of the most important indicators of what is happening inside.

One of McRoberts' first tasks was to re-establish Midnight's Farm's wireless temperature monitoring system (separate from the farm's regular wired setup), which was used for past experiments and had been offline for six months. After identifying and testing damaged probes, troubleshooting communication failures and reconnecting hardware, McRoberts brought the system

back online. This was essential for her own research, she says, because “without reliable temperature measurements, it would be nearly impossible to assess whether the compost is receiving adequate oxygen, how active decomposition is occurring, or how different management strategies influence the composting process.”

The composting project has led McRoberts to think about the broader systems and people that make community-scale sustainability possible, especially on a small island like Lopez.

“Living on Lopez Island has given me a deeper appreciation for both the possibilities and the challenges of community life,” she says. “The island is extraordinarily beautiful, but it also faces many of the pressures affecting rural communities across the country—housing affordability, rising land values, an aging population and economic inequality.”

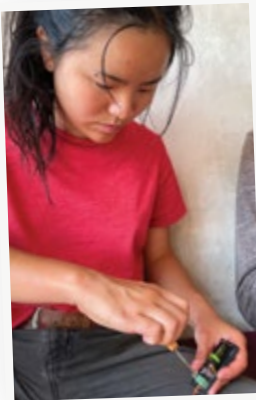
During her time at Pomona, McRoberts has been increasingly involved in political organizing. In her sophomore year, with her friend Claudio Castillo '26, she co-founded Critical Mass, a student organization that encourages STEM students to consider who their work serves and what kind of world it is helping to create. They have explored such topics as surveillance technology, the political economy of scientific research and growing attacks on public education and intellectual life.

That social justice lens led her to seek out opportunities where she could use her scientific training in ways that felt directly connected to community needs. The Lopez Island composting project, she says, allowed her to apply physics in a context with tangible and immediate benefits.

“I am constantly reminded that technical knowledge is not neutral,” she says. “It matters deeply how we choose to use it, and I have found it remarkably rewarding to apply it in service of a community working to sustain itself.”

McRoberts found digging into manual farm labor equally satisfying. Biking to the grocery store on Lopez Island, she says, “I would see the mixed greens we harvested, washed, dried and bagged that very morning, or the raspberries that we woke up an hour and a half early to harvest so as to avoid the sun.”

There was a moment, she says, echoing German philosopher Karl Marx, where she caught a glimpse of herself in her work. “Meaningful labor,” she says, “allows us to encounter ourselves in the world we have and continue to make.” [PCM](#)



Lina McRoberts fixing a compost temperature probe.



PEELING BACK TIME

As “Big Bridges” approaches its 2031 centennial, its iconic ceiling mural, created by Italian American artist Giovanni Smeraldi, has undergone a full restoration supported by a \$1 million donation from the Timken Foundation.

“The Smeraldi mural is a priceless work of art that should be preserved for future generations to enjoy,” says Kurt Timken '86. It was Timken's great-aunt, Amelia Bridges, who, with her husband, Appleton Bridges, funded the original construction of Big Bridges and Little Bridges, in memory of their daughter, Mabel, who died in 1907 during her junior year at Pomona.

Brooklyn-based EverGreene Architectural Arts carried out the restoration work, which began with assessing obvious damage—water staining, cracks from the 1994 Northridge earthquake and overall fading and peeling—and cleaning the entire ceiling with dry sponges. An elaborate scaffolding system allowed the conservators to reach every inch of the mural.

When audiences return to the auditorium this fall, the ceiling won't look vastly different, just a little fresher. Since the last restoration in the 1970s, explains restorer Brynn Griffiths, “dirt and soot and smoke and time” have taken their toll. “A lot of the pigments that were used in the past,” she says, “were not light fast, and with time they discolor and oxidize.”

The most noticeable changes for audience members may be the proscenium arch and the underside of the balcony (EverGreene site lead Marlene Sophia is shown here applying Dutch metal leaf to that area). The restoration team was able to peel back an area of the tan paint that has covered it for the last 50 years and uncover the original colors and patterns beneath. [PCM](#)

On the Celestial Beat

Sagehens are helping monitor our solar system, one clear night at a time.

By Travis Khachatoorian

It's 10 p.m., and three Pomona College students are just getting their night started.

Huddled in a closet-sized room alongside Associate Professor of Physics and Astronomy Phil Choi, they're searching a computer screen for their next celestial target. The click of a button triggers the mechanical sound of metal and gears groaning through the walls.

Just outside, a massive telescope carefully pivots into position across the night sky.

These stargazing Sagehens are not on campus. They're perched atop a 7,000-foot peak in the San Gabriel Mountains at Pomona College's Table Mountain Observatory (TMO), scanning the sky for Near Earth Asteroids.

"These are potential impactors," Choi says of the asteroids. "We've been working for years trying to discover these things, determine their orbits and decide whether they're potentially hazardous."



Tala Istanbuli '28 and Professor Phil Choi tinker with the hardware underneath the one-meter telescope.

"If they are," he adds, "we follow them up." Designed and constructed in the 1980s, the observatory's research capabilities were limited during its first few decades. But in the past five years, TMO has exploded onto the astronomy scene as a productive science machine.

"We're active every clear night," Choi says, "so we're involved in a very serious way in two or three big collaborations where we're churning out data on a night-to-night basis."

TMO provides an advanced learning opportunity that many young astrophysicists don't receive until grad school. It's also been a boon for recruiting high-caliber students to the College.

"I did not think coming in that I would have the level of hands-on experience, the level of interaction with senior researchers at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory [and] the level of interaction with collaborators around the world," Sage Santomenna '26 says.

Santomenna turned down multiple R1 university offers in favor of attending Pomona College for its astrophysics program. Their work at TMO was the foundation of a prestigious Goldwater Scholarship awarded for the 2025-26 academic year.

Santomenna exemplifies the important roles students have played in bolstering the telescope through its history, Choi says.

"I'd say there's been a factor of 10 increase in the efficiency of our telescope based on a lot of the software tools that Sage has been able to build for us," Choi says.

On more than one occasion, Choi has been asked why he doesn't roboticize and automate the observatory to pump out nonstop research for collaborators.

His answer is always the same: It's important that TMO remains accessible to Pomona students.

Since taking over as the facility's point-person 18 years ago, Choi has worked with students to secure multiple National Science Foundation and NASA grants to build up the million-dollar instrumentation and high-tech software that are the bedrock of the now modernized telescope.

As TMO continues to evolve in leaps and bounds, the astrophysics world has taken notice.

The combination of advanced instrumentation and year-round, immediate access enables TMO to occupy a unique niche in high-spatial and temporal-resolution imaging of fast-moving objects. For the Near Earth Asteroid study, the TMO facility achieves astrometric performance better than all but a handful of competing systems in the world.

"It's a humble one-meter telescope," Choi says, "so compared to a lot of other instruments doing this research, it's small. But the thing that makes it special is the hardware on the back end is doing something that very few facilities do."

"People are sometimes skeptical of our technique, but our results speak for themselves." [PCM](#)



Pomona's Table Mountain Observatory near Wrightwood, California.

A Bridge to the World

A student trip to China leaves a lasting legacy.

By Christy McCarthy

When Chiu-Mi Lai '83 boarded a train in Hong Kong bound for mainland China in 1981, she carried more books than luggage. She also carried a rare opportunity to see a country that had only recently reopened to the world.

More than four decades later, that journey has come full circle in the form of a new gift to Pomona College.

Lai and her husband, David Mohrig '83, established an endowed fund honoring Emeritus Professor of Politics David Elliott and his wife, Mai Elliott, whose mentorship left a lasting mark on her life.

"This gift is an acknowledgment of the impact a professor can have on students, which is the greatest reward for a teacher," David Elliott says.

The fund will support Pomona students pursuing experiential learning opportunities in Asia, covering costs including travel, research and service projects.

"About half of Pomona students study away, and we are committed to expanding those opportunities so more students can engage in the transformative learning that has long defined the College," says Kara Godwin, assistant vice president and chief global officer.

The 1981 trip took place as China was slowly emerging from the devastation of its cultural revolution and was tentatively opening to the outside world. This allowed Nanjing University to accept a group of students from the College as part of an exchange, making Pomona students, as David Elliott says, "pioneers"—part of an unofficial diplomatic opening between the U.S. and China.

Lai recalls lectures unfolding on trains, stacks of books hauled overseas and the close-knit group navigating an unfamiliar world together.

"David and Mai had to manage everything—courses, travel, bureaucracy—all with their 5-year-old son in tow," Lai says. "Looking back, I appreciate even more the sacrifice they made in taking us there."

For David Elliott, the experience was just as formative.

"Whenever Mai and I reminisce about that trip, we remember the students' curiosity about a country they had known only through classes," he says, "and the unfailing warmth and generosity of the Chinese people, who had so little at the time, yet showed such resiliency and hope for the future."

Lai, who along with Mohrig taught at the University of Texas at Austin before retiring in spring 2026, says she and her husband shared the lessons from their Pomona experience with their students, as well.

"Learning happens in the classroom, but so much of what stays with you for the rest of your life happens outside of it," she says.

To learn more about supporting study away opportunities for Pomona students, contact Kyle Davis, senior director of development at Kyle.Davis@pomona.edu. [PCM](#)



Pomona College professor David Elliott (bottom row, third from right) and wife, Mai (bottom row, third from left), led a semester-long trip to China in 1981. Today, Chiu-Mi Lai '83 and her husband, David Mohrig '83, are honoring the couple's impact on students with a gift.



Chiu-Mi Lai '83, pictured here on her 1981 journey to China (Metate, 1983).

When Saving the World Isn't Enough

A Conversation with Jane Chen '00

By Lorraine Wu Harry '97

Fifteen years ago, *PCM* profiled Jane Chen '00, CEO and co-founder of Embrace Global, which has saved over 1 million babies around the world with its groundbreaking low-cost, portable incubator. In that role, Chen was selected for Forbes' Impact 30, received both

"I've realized that 'enoughness'—that sense of worthiness—has to come from within."

the Economist Innovation Award and the Fast Company Innovation Award, and was named Social Entrepreneur of the Year by the World Economic Forum in 2013. Beyoncé supported the work through a grant, and President Barack Obama invited Chen to the White House to demonstrate the product.

But when Embrace nearly collapsed after a decade, Chen was forced to confront her inner demons. Chen's book *Like a Wave We Break: A Memoir of Falling Apart and Finding Myself* lays bare her journey from a traumatic

upbringing to the burnout she experienced running Embrace to her desperate search for healing. She talks to *PCM* about why she wrote the book, the impact it's had and the work she is doing after stepping down from leading Embrace.

How is it for you to meet people who already know so much about your life from reading the book?

I've noticed my conversations go much deeper much more quickly. When you're vulnerable, you create space for others to be vulnerable, too.

I wrote this book because I hoped that sharing my experiences might help others; if it hadn't been for that, I don't think I would have written it. That's been the most rewarding aspect of putting the book into the world—so many people have come to me saying, "I feel seen for the first time" or "This is my story, too."

I've heard that especially from Asian Americans and immigrants, but the themes are universal. Anyone who has experienced trauma, adversity or struggled with the feeling that they're not enough can find themselves in the story.

How do your parents feel about you sharing your family's private affairs so publicly?

Starting this project, that was my biggest concern. I didn't want anyone in the book to be portrayed negatively, so my intention was to write about every character with love and respect—and also to tell the truth. I didn't want this to be a story of blame or victimhood. I wanted to honestly share the things that have shaped me, including the dynamics within my family, intergenerational trauma, the history of my lineage.

As I got closer to releasing the book, I sat with my parents and told them what I was writing about and why. Of course, sharing such personal family experiences publicly isn't easy, but going through this process has brought me closer to my parents and given me a greater sense of understanding and peace in our relationship.

What are you doing now, and what lies ahead for you?

Embrace was resurrected after we nearly shut down, and as of last year we have reached over a million babies. I stepped down from the company after leading it for almost two decades, and I passed the torch to a new CEO. It feels wonderful to step away knowing the legacy continues.

Now, I'm doing keynote speaking, leadership development and coaching. I am working with companies and senior leaders on everything from resilience and self-awareness to emotional intelligence and building cultures rooted in trust and connection. These are skills that are especially important in the age of AI, as the world around us changes so rapidly.

When we become aware of the patterns that shape us, we're more likely to lead from a place of love, purpose and compassion rather than fear, ego and control. If more of us operated from that place, the world would look very different.

As high achievers, we're often our own worst critics. That voice constantly pushing and berating us may get us somewhere, but eventually it begins to work against us. When we learn to treat ourselves with greater kindness and compassion, we're more able to extend that to others.



How has being an Asian American woman shaped your leadership and healing experiences?

Growing up in an Asian immigrant family, I learned to keep difficult emotions to myself and placed a lot of value on achievement. As a first-time CEO, I felt enormous pressure to be composed and have it all together.

But the issue we were working on was inherently emotional, and we encountered every challenge you could imagine. Early on when I lived in India to do this work, I broke down in a team meeting. I was mortified—it was all men reporting to me at the time. The next day, my head of operations came to me and said, "Thank you so much for being vulnerable. When you're vulnerable, it gives us all permission to be vulnerable as well."

That moment began to change my understanding of what strength and leadership could look like. I realized that vulnerability wasn't the opposite of strength; it could actually be a source of connection.

Achievement was another big part of this for me. So many of us believe we're not enough, so we have to do more, achieve more or reach the next milestone to finally feel worthy. But you get there, and there's always another milestone. I've realized that "enoughness"—that sense of worthiness—has to come from within.

Where are you on your healing journey now? Is it ever done?

I think healing is ultimately about finding deep inner peace within yourself. It's very hard to measure progress on this front, but the biggest shift for me is that the inner dialogue in my head has changed. It doesn't mean that those critical voices don't come up. But there's another voice now as well that says, "You are enough. You've got this."

I still make mistakes. But I can be kind to myself in the process. And I've found that having self-compassion allows me to take greater risks because I know if I fail, I can brush myself off and keep going.

The biggest lesson I've learned is that I can't always control what happens around me or how other people respond to me. I can only choose to act according to my values—and to keep choosing love over and over again. To me, that's healing.

Learn more and connect with Jane Chen at www.janemariechen.com. [PCM](#)

[Excerpt]



The Plunge: Maverick Swimmers, an Unlikely Quest, and the Transformative Power of Cold Water

Simon and Schuster, 2026

By Chris Ballard '95

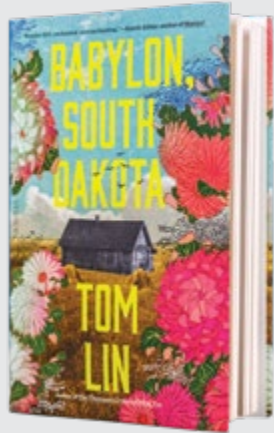
A deep dive into the world of cold water plunging and swimming that combines adventurous journalism with in-depth research.

"As for cold, we tend to view it as something to be endured, teeth gritted, or better yet, avoided, opting for warm homes and hot showers.

But combine swimming and cold, and do it with others, out in nature? Therein lies the sweet spot. There, you get it all: endorphins, adrenaline, camaraderie, and awe, creating what renowned open water swimmer Lynne Cox has called 'an acute awareness of your life, in the moment.'

It makes sense. Jump into the ocean or a lake, and where else can you be but right there, right then? No emails, reminders, or to-do lists. No social media scroll, mortgage payments, or broken garage door. You can't dwell or obsess or loop, because how can you when you're in five feet of chilled water, a tourist in a foreign ecosystem? In an age when so many of us fight for a moment of clarity or calm, turning to meditation apps, breathing regimens and prescriptions, here is an age-old solution."

[Excerpt]

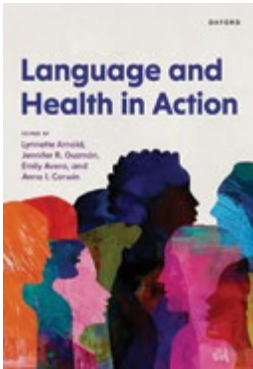


Babylon, South Dakota
Little, Brown and Company, 2026
By Tom Lin '18

A saga about a Chinese couple trying to eke out a living on their Dakota farm, which takes a supernatural turn when the U.S. Army builds a nuclear missile silo on their land.

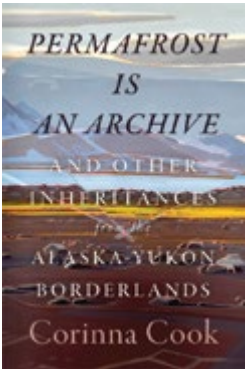
“Called to this distant land by the death of an unknown kinsman and the promise of a new life came Hsiu Keng and his wife, Lee Mei, thirty-seven and thirty-three, who owned together but one suitcase full of clothes and an old leather knapsack filled with treasures that had survived the furor of the revolution: untranslated documents attesting to their births and marriage, three and a half misshapen tael of gold, a jade pendant carved into the shape of a monkey, a red coral bracelet too small for either of their wrists, a little booklet of family photographs, a transistor radio, and a silk bag of chrysanthemum seeds. They took possession of one hundred and sixty acres of soil that sloped, south to north across folded ridges, down to an overgrown pasture.”

Books by Sagehens



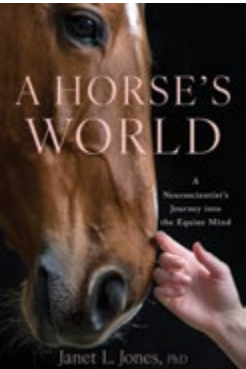
Language and Health in Action
Oxford University Press, 2026
By Emily Avera '05 (editor)
This volume, co-edited by Avera, explores the far-reaching consequences of communication practices on health and well-being outcomes.

Permafrost Is an Archive and Other Inheritances from the Alaska-Yukon Borderlands
West Virginia University Press, 2026
By Corinna Cook '07
In this collection of essays, Cook wrestles with difficult pasts and an uncertain ecological future of the Alaska-Yukon borderlands through a deeply personal lens.



A Horse's World:
A Neuroscientist's Journey into the Equine Mind
Little, Brown and Company, 2026
By Janet Jones '84
A neuroscientist and veteran horse trainer, Jones explores the science of how horses think, feel, learn and connect with their human companions.

The Age of Fury
Penguin Random House, 2026
By John Stephens '94
The setting for Stephens' historical romantic thriller is Gilded Age New York, as a 17-year-old Irish girl joins forces with a young gangster to hunt down her sister's killer.



Social Security for Future Generations: Sustainability, Equity, Simplification
Upriver Press, 2026
By John Turner '71 (co-author)
Turner, a leading economist and scholar on Social Security and pensions, presents feasible solutions to uphold Social Security for future generations.

Tiny Garden: A Picture Book
Abrams, 2026
By Deborah Underwood '83
In this picture book by Underwood (illustrated by Jax Chow), a boy who loves plants grows his own tiny garden in a neighborhood full of big, showy gardens.

Book Submissions

If you've had a book published and would like to submit it for inclusion in Bookshelf, please send a review copy to

Lorraine Wu Harry '97,
PCM Books Editor,
550 North College Ave.
Claremont, CA 91711
or email us at pcmbooks@pomona.edu.

Gentle Giant

This many-legged friend, happily residing in Seaver South since 2024, is the creation of American sculptor and prolific public artist Tom Otterness.

Aptly titled “Millipede,” the 25-foot-long bronze sculpture was given to the college by Janet Benton '79, Pomona College alumna and chair of the Board of Trustees.

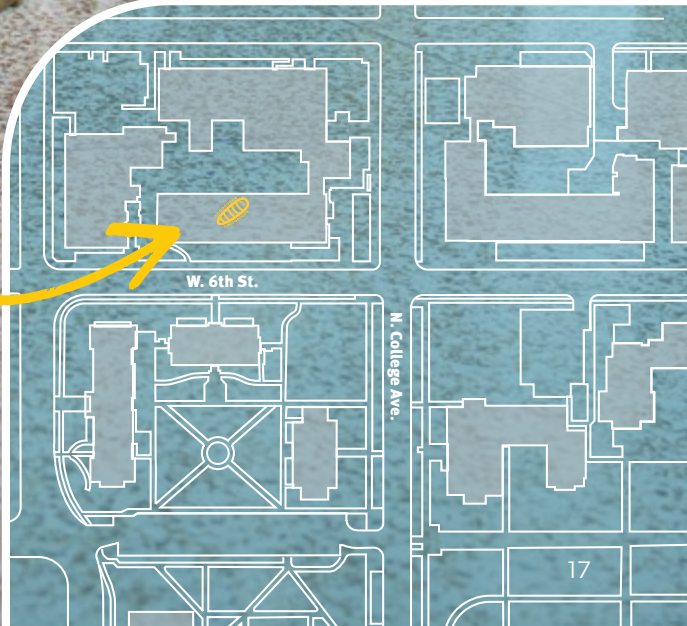
A full-scale cardboard mock-up was created by two interns to determine optimal placement before the final move.

For many years, the shiny arthropod had lived in an outdoor location, requiring regular surface treatment. Benton's gift was contingent upon the museum finding a suitable, sheltered space on campus.



Otterness is known for playful, cartoonish sculptures that often blend humor with social commentary. Our millipede may be an anomaly.

Public art pieces by Otterness can be found in the New York Subway, the zoo at San Jose, Manhattan's Battery Park City and cities including Seoul, Toronto and Scheveningen, the Netherlands.





5 QUESTIONS FOR:

Danielle Lynch

Pomona-Pitzer Director of Athletics and Chair of the Physical Education Department

By Brian Whitehead

Danielle Lynch traces her competitive nature to childhood, when as a young fan of Olympic champion sprinter Florence Griffith Joyner, she raced friends down her northern New Jersey neighborhood streets barefoot.

She almost always won.

“That’s when I learned I don’t need anything but who I am to be successful,” she says.

Lynch used that outlook to become a first-generation student-athlete at Rutgers University, and it’s the same perspective she’s brought to Pomona-Pitzer as director of athletics and chair of the Physical Education Department, a role she began in April.

“I felt the love immediately,” she says. “I felt supported. People are asking the right questions and then truly listening for the answers to the solutions they’re seeking. People are truly wanting to engage in meaningful ways to learn about my experiences and how I’m going to work with our students.”

Lynch recently answered questions about the Sagehen community, philanthropy, holistic development and wellness, and the hallmarks of great athletic departments.

What traits do great athletic departments have in common?

Great athletic departments have core values that are strong. They’re student centered. They have coaches that are teaching and building culture. Winning helps people feel good, but great athletic departments have a healthy, successful culture that develops young people holistically. A byproduct of that, oftentimes, is winning, and not only winning in the sport, but also winning in life. I’ve been at a lot of places that do things really, really well, and I’ve gained different tidbits of excellence from those spaces to work into my own ethos and core values on how I’d like my department to be run.

How do you hope to strengthen connections between student-athletes, alumni and the broader Pomona community?

College is full of incredible opportunities, but it’s also a time when students face real challenges—academically, socially and personally.

When alumni and families stay engaged, they help create a network of people who care deeply about student success and well-being. I think one of the most powerful things we can do is create opportunities for just that by bringing people together around the things that matter most—supporting student wellness, celebrating their achievements on and off the field and ensuring they have what they need to thrive.

Alumni and families can play such a meaningful role in both celebrating those successes, while also helping address the obstacles students face along the way.

What role do alumni and families play in the success of an athletics program?

Alumni show our current student-athletes what a Sagehen life looks like after they’ve left the bubble of collegiate athletics with an excellent liberal arts education. They help us with mentorship as well as career networks, and they model what our current student-athletes and students in general hope to become. Families are partners in the developmental mission. We recruit families, not just athletes.

We are also incredibly grateful for the many alumni and families whose generosity strengthen Sagehen Athletics. Their support helps create opportunities for student-athletes to pursue excellence while benefiting from the full Pomona experience—from competitive athletics and leadership development to academic achievement and personal growth.

That spirit of support is reflected in Sagehen Athletics Giving Day, where alumni and families have consistently rallied behind our athletes, supporting everything from team travel to facility upgrades. Their generosity is a powerful expression of the lifelong connection so many have to Pomona and its athletic community.

Where can community support make an immediate impact?

Sagehen Athletics creates a powerful entry point for Pomona alumni, families and friends to invest in student success. Their involvement—whether through mentorship, volunteerism or cheering in the stands—supports an experience that helps our Pomona-Pitzer student-athletes develop as leaders and scholars. Donor support in particular strengthens wellness, expands career development opportunities and helps

ensure that every student has the resources needed to learn, grow and thrive.

I also encourage Sagehens to reach out to me directly so I can hear what is needed, and what concerns and questions we all have. We need to have honest and open conversations about opportunities to create community, excellence and holistic development.

What responsibility do athletic departments have in shaping good citizens and leaders?

Some of my doctoral research looked at social justice and leadership. Student-athletes

have social capital, especially on liberal arts campuses that lack fraternity and sorority life. We want to help develop our student-athletes to become conscientious leaders who are bringing solutions to some of the larger issues we’re facing—not only as a country but worldwide.

Student-athletes have the power to shift culture and to make change on a large scale, so it’s our responsibility to help them understand the power they hold and activate it for good. [PCM](#)

Data Driven Ali Bennett ’27

Hometown: San Francisco

Major: Mathematics

Pomona sport: Women’s Basketball

Ali Bennett ’27 has been fascinated by sports analytics since she read Michael Lewis’ renowned 2003 book *Moneyball: The Art of Winning an Unfair Game* her first year at Pomona College.

This summer, she used the Pomona College Internship Program (PCIP) to learn what would be required of her should she pursue a career in such a data-driven field.

Bennett interned with the San Francisco Seagulls Baseball Academy, which offers all-season developmental teams for youth, high school and collegiate ballplayers.

As a data and analytics intern, Bennett worked with game-day technologies that track player movement, keep live score and record gameplay from different angles on the field.

Between first pitches, she drew up scouting reports, cut video upon request and crafted a dashboard for players to see their statistics. She was also expected to be on top of communication and respectful of others’ time—the same habits that help her basketball team function.



“Quick and reliable communication helps build trust and makes everything run smoothly,” she says.

The six-week apprenticeship has convinced Bennett to pursue a career in sports analytics—a path several Pomona alumni have followed in recent years to great success.

She intends to use her experience in San Francisco to guide her senior thesis, and after she concludes her playing career at Pomona this winter, she plans to look for analytics work in basketball, her true love.

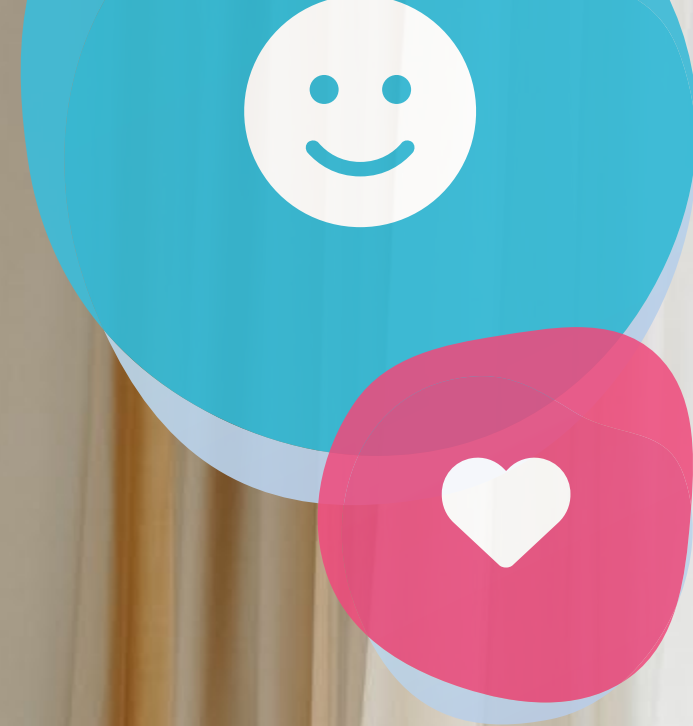
“I’m looking forward to coming up with useful connections between the sport and the numbers,” she says. “It’s super cool to now know I can use numbers to make a big impact on the game.” [PCM](#)

Building



How (and why) a Pomona alum quit investment banking and launched a friendship and dating app for the neurodivergent community.

BY CHRIS QUIRK
PHOTOS BY EVA WOOLRIDGE



Jamil Karriem '12 had just met up with his younger cousin for drinks and dinner at a trattoria in his hometown of South Orange, New Jersey, and he was worried. His cousin, with whom Karriem is very close, is autistic, and during their conversation he confided to Karriem that he was having a hard time finding friends and expressed fear that he would not be able to find a partner in life.

When he returned home that night to his brownstone in Brooklyn, New York, Karriem did some research. “What I found really terrified me,” he says. “Autistic adults were far more likely to report feelings of loneliness and far more likely to die by suicide. The research suggested it had nothing to do with neurological predispositions and everything to do with lack of access.”

Karriem decided to help. “At first I assumed I was going to Google some resources to text him, and that would be the end of it, but I just wasn’t able to find anything that I was comfortable sharing,” he says. “That sort of triggered my own educational journey.”

Karriem kicked some ideas around in his head that night and hit on the idea of creating a dating app for those with autism. Nine years later, the app Karriem first envisioned, Hiki (which means “able” in Hawaiian) has millions of downloads and half a million daily active users. In the process, Hiki has grown rapidly (it officially launched in 2019) and is now open to all neurodivergent persons. It’s expanded to be a combination friendship and dating app, which connects members interested in romance, but also includes a social media area for conversations. “Our users are seeking companionship, whether it be platonic or romantic,” says Karriem. “Also, the way neurodivergent brains often experience the world is that conceptually it wouldn’t even make sense to skip friendship to get to romance.”

At the start, Karriem had little idea of what his new quest would demand. He was living in New York City, working in investment banking and already had a full plate, but he knew he was onto a possibly transformational idea. “I was working all day at my job, then developing the app from 10 until 2 in the morning. Rinse and repeat,” he says. “I’m a non-technical founder—I don’t write code—which is more common now than it was then, but I know how to design with empathy and I know how to bring a product to market.”

Puzzle With 1,000 Pieces

Before designing an app, Karriem first had to learn more about people with autism. “I was dealing with a sample size of one, my cousin, and so I started reaching out to more autistic adults to learn what they were experiencing.” Karriem asked friends and family and contacted any organization he could find that worked with autistic adults to see if they knew people who would speak with him about their lives. In total, he conducted more than 1,000 interviews.



His sociology degree was a major asset. “This was all qualitative data. Shout-out to Pomona College, and to my professor, Dr. Gilda Ochoa, who was my advisor and taught me all those skills.”

Contrary to the typical tech startup, where developers first seek deep-pocketed investors, Karriem instead first funded his project by emptying his savings account. From there he raised \$5,000 in a pitch competition, and another \$10,000 at a second pitch competition. “At the second one there was a venture capitalist who just happened to see my pitch. He wasn’t part of the competition,” says Karriem. “After I won, he took my card and then cut a check for \$100,000. That’s when I quit my job. Now we’re a pretty traditional venture capital-backed startup and have raised about \$5 million to date.”

The development and growth process for Hiki was relentless. Karriem and Efstathios Ntonas, the chief technology officer at Hiki, responded to new needs and ideas for the app, almost in real time. “We were updating and implementing what the community wanted,” Ntonas says. “Sometimes we were adding new features every day.”



“We were updating and implementing what the community wanted. Sometimes we were adding new features every day.”
—Efstathios Ntonas, Hiki CTO



“Our users are seeking companionship, whether it be platonic or romantic. Also, the way neurodivergent brains often experience the world is that conceptually it wouldn’t even make sense to skip friendship to get to romance.” —Jamil Karriem

Unique App for a Unique Group

The abundance of features and options built into the app are all part of Karriem’s goal to give users the power to customize the app as they wish, and the staff of seven at Hiki, who are also all neurodivergent, are always listening.

“We’ve built the tools to enable people to do things their own way, which is all that neurodivergent people have ever really wanted—to be supported to do what we know is right for us and be guided along the way in case things go a little wrong,” says Sef Cavendish, community moderator and user outreach coordinator. “The famous phrase is, if you’ve met one autistic person, you’ve met one autistic person. We are all so different, even though we have a lot of similar traits that have led to the construct of us sharing the same diagnosis.”

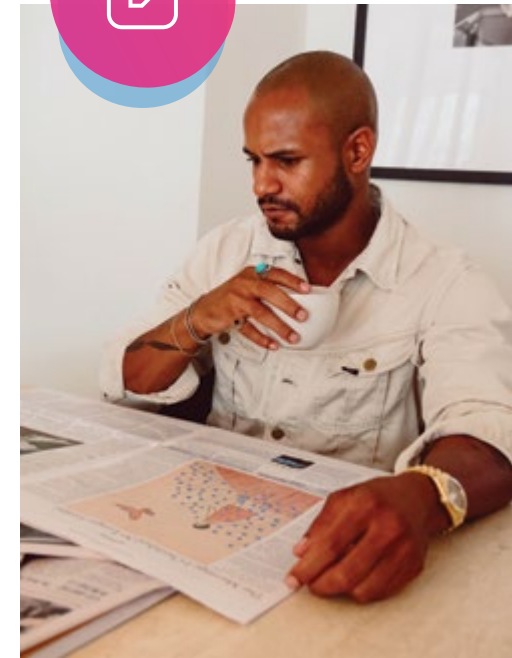
Ntonas says he more or less retains the code for the app in his head. He is tasked with implementing the massive array of controls for users and can tell right away if a change will conflict with the functionality of the site. Ntonas says the complexity is a challenge, but worth it to make the user experience of the neurodivergent community that use the app more comfortable. “There’s no part of the app that users can’t put their hands on and control.”

That is not a trivial aspect of the plan, Karriem explains. “Some things are so customizable that it can feel excessive compared to other platforms. Other details may feel redundant. We make counterintuitive decisions all the time based on our community’s input. Giving individuals control over their unique experience honors the reality that no two neurodivergent people are alike.”

Hiki has enjoyed booming growth since its debut—Karriem estimates the user base has doubled year over year—and those on the app have responded positively. One user, a 52-year-old with autism, said Hiki had helped them break an extended cycle of isolation. Another said, “I’ve talked to more people in two hours on here [Hiki] than I have in the past 10 years probably.” Karriem has received notes from users saying they met their current spouse on Hiki. “We will be forever grateful for what you made possible,” wrote one, announcing their upcoming wedding.

Looking Inward

As part of the discovery process, Karriem learned about his own ADHD, which had been veiled to him throughout his life. “I began to think about things I struggle with. I never understood why someone changing plans at the last minute would give me extreme



**“Giving individuals control over their unique experience honors the reality that no two neurodivergent people are alike.”
—Jamil Karriem**

anxiety. When I was a kid it could lead to an outburst,” he says. “I learned coping mechanisms, but then you realize, wait, my neurotypical friends don’t have to sit alone in a dark room after they socialize. I’m just a little different.”

Says Cavendish: “In Jamil, we have somebody that took a risk and created something from a place of care for a community he didn’t even realize was his own yet. We’ve been through so many big waves that have almost broken up this boat, but we’re still here. Jamil got us through.”

On principle the company leaves money on the table that other tech firms don’t. “We don’t run ads on the platform because they’re overstimulating, we don’t track user data, and every single core feature is available completely for free,” says Karriem. “People are meeting the love of their life, and they’re meeting their best friend, or they’re finding somebody that they can talk to.”

Hiki workers are all remote and stay in touch with a virtual meeting each morning, and Karriem has one-on-one meetings with each employee every two weeks. A typical day for Karriem begins with a 6 a.m. walk with his dog, Money (a rescue dog and likely a chihuahua mix) around his Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood in central Brooklyn, followed by several hours of focused work before a trip to the gym mid-morning to work out. Afternoons he typically works in a remote office, doing Zoom calls or other tasks, or he may head in to Manhattan for an in-person meeting before returning home for dinner. “I’m a huge cook, and I’m also Jamaican, so I typically make a lot of Caribbean food.”

Pomona Homecoming

During the spring semester, Susie Wise, innovator in residence at The Hive, and author of the book *Design for Belonging: How to Build Inclusion and Collaboration in Your Communities*, asked Karriem to join her Advanced Human-Centered Design course. “I think it was really interesting for them to get to both meet Jamil as an entrepreneur but also understand how he’s really paying attention



to these deep human needs of the users on his platform, which is about making human connections,” says Wise. “So it had a really nice resonance with our using human-centered design practices.”

The class examined a Hiki feature called Match, a tool for users that helps them find people with whom they could be compatible as friends or partners. “The challenge was to reimagine it, and there were lots of interesting implications. There were four project teams, and they all built stories of ways that Match could work differently. So they built those and shared them with Hiki,” says Wise. “I think this is also a great full-circle moment when students get to work on a real-world challenge that’s brought to them by somebody from Pomona.”

For the final presentations by the class, Karriem returned to campus. It was the first time he had been back to Pomona in many years. “It was incredible. The campus is so beautiful and the energy so special. The relationships that I made on campus are still, to this day, the most important in my life,” he says. “Two of my best friends—Jesse Stoneman [’12] and Rahul Misra [’12]—married each other. They just had a baby and are literally raising her in the condo above two more of our best friends—Greg Wright [’12] and Nicola Parisi [’12]. The first person I ever met was Andre Shepley [’12] while high school seniors on prospective student weekend for students of color. We hit it off right away, were freshman roommates, and I was best man at his wedding. We’re brothers to this day.”

Karriem said the student work was excellent. “They were so full of vibrant ideas and strong opinions,” he says. “Having this outlet to teach, support and learn from the students gave me a new creative outlet that I absolutely loved.” [PCM](#)

**THE
CAMPAIGN
FOR
POMONA
COLLEGE**

Originals

When Pomona College was founded nearly 140 years ago, our founders imagined something new: a college in a garden, rooted in the traditions of the liberal arts but alive to the possibilities of a changing world. That willingness to imagine what might be possible has carried Pomona forward ever since, from President James Blaisdell’s audacious vision for a community of distinctive colleges to our continuing commitment to finding extraordinary human talent wherever it may be.

Original thinking is our inheritance. At Pomona, students learn to think differently and broadly, to take intellectual risks and approach the world with curiosity, humility and care. Our originals are not rugged individualists striking out alone. They understand that ideas flourish in community—and that our greatest possibilities emerge when we learn from and work alongside people whose experiences and perspectives differ from our own.

The world needs those qualities now more than ever. It needs people who are unafraid to question assumptions, who can turn knowledge into understanding and who believe deeply in our capacity to work together. It needs Sagehens.

Originals: The Campaign for Pomona College is our commitment to ensuring that Pomona continues to prepare them. Together, we will expand access for extraordinary students, invest in transformative teaching and emerging fields of knowledge, deepen both global learning and collaboration, strengthen the ties that connect us across lifetimes and nurture the health and well-being that allow every member of our community to flourish.

Generations before us made this Pomona possible. Now it is our turn to imagine and make possible the Pomona that generations to come will need.

G. Gabrielle Starr, President

Making Pomona Accessible

Pomona's future depends on its ability to attract the most talented students wherever they are found.

Every year, exceptional young people arrive on campus carrying extraordinary ambition, creativity, determination and promise. They enrich every classroom, laboratory, studio, residence hall and athletic field. They challenge one another. They expand one another's horizons. They elevate the entire community.

But making Pomona accessible means more than opening the door. It means ensuring that students from every socioeconomic background—including middle-income families for whom a Pomona education may still feel out of reach—can choose Pomona and participate fully once they are here. Through *Originals*, we will expand financial aid while helping ensure that every Sagehen has access to the tools and resources that make the full Pomona experience possible.

That commitment begins with new financial aid for middle-income students, alongside expanded support for Pomona's current financial aid program. And because the true cost of college extends beyond tuition, Access to Course Essentials (ACE) and the Technology Access Program (TAP) will help provide the technology, materials and academic essentials students need to make the most of their Pomona education.



Making the Invisible Visible

"I'd never taken an economics class before," says Rachel Nguyen '26. "The only economics experience I had was helping my mom with the books at the nail salon."

At Pomona, Rachel discovered economics as a tool for understanding communities like her own. Her pioneering econometric research on Vietnamese nail salons and technicians documented a workforce often overlooked in official datasets, laying groundwork that could inform labor policy and protections for

immigrant workers. "It begins with the data," she says.

Pomona also opened doors beyond the classroom. A fellowship in California Governor Gavin Newsom's office gave Rachel firsthand experience in public service, while Pomona-funded study abroad took her to Vietnam, where she became the first in her family to return and reconnect with relatives.

Rachel's first stop after Pomona? Graduate study in economics at the University of Chicago, where she will confront new datasets and new questions with the same instinct to look beyond the obvious.



Leading in a Changing World

The defining challenges of our time refuse to stay in a single discipline.

Climate change. Artificial intelligence. Global migration. Public health. Democratic participation. Economic inequality.

Meeting these challenges requires more than expertise. It requires people who can connect ideas across fields, cultures and perspectives and transform insight into action.

This campaign will accelerate faculty-student research, expand global learning opportunities, strengthen interdisciplinary teaching and invest in emerging areas of inquiry. It will position Pomona as a national model for the next generation of liberal arts education—one that prepares students not simply to navigate change, but to shape it.

Philanthropy will make this ambition possible at every level. Campaign investments will build the Center for Global Engagement; create new endowed faculty positions; expand global learning, collaboration and dialogue; advance inclusive excellence; strengthen academic support; and provide faculty with the fellowships, resources and professional development they need to pursue ambitious ideas. Together, these investments will give Pomona the people, programs and places to keep pushing the boundaries of a liberal arts education.

Reaching Beyond Our Gates

For generations, Pomona students have learned that some of the most consequential education happens when they cross boundaries—between disciplines, cultures, communities and ways of seeing the world. The new Center for Global Engagement will create a home for that kind of discovery.

Now under construction, the \$125 million Center is Pomona's most ambitious capital project to date. Designed as a living-learning "liberal arts laboratory," it brings together residential life, dining, classrooms and collaborative spaces, housing 200 students and welcoming the entire community for global and interdisciplinary learning.

Its promise is being realized through extraordinary philanthropy with \$50 million in support from the Pomona community helping move the center's construction and programs forward. Among the transformational commitments are a \$10 million gift from Board Chair Janet Inskeep Benton '79 and a \$10 million commitment from Trustee Emeritus Ranney E. Draper '60 and his late wife, Priscilla. Their generosity builds on decades of leadership and investment in the College, reflecting a shared belief in preparing Sagehens to engage meaningfully with a changing world.

That spirit of exploration extends to many others who support the Center and related programs. The philanthropy of Karen Q. Wong P'29 and Kelvin Huang P'29 honors Karen's father and his lifelong belief in education. Their fund will support study away in China, giving future students opportunities to learn through language, culture and firsthand experience.

Together, these gifts and many others demonstrate what the Center makes possible: not simply a new building, but an enduring ecosystem for curiosity, connection and learning across borders.





Nurturing Our Whole Community

A truly transformative educational experience engages the whole person—and the whole community.

Original thinking requires more than intellect. It requires confidence. Resilience. Belonging. It requires the freedom to take risks, pursue ambitious questions, recover from failure and begin again. No one does that alone. Pomona’s commitment to student, faculty and staff success extends beyond the classroom to encompass wellness, mentorship, belonging, athletics, residential life, leadership development and the many experiences that help people discover who they are and what they are capable of becoming.

This campaign will strengthen the conditions that allow all to flourish. It will expand access to wellness resources, deepen mentorship and community-building opportunities, enhance student life and athletics and create an environment where every student can participate fully in the life of the College. Great communities do more than support achievement. They make achievement possible.

Philanthropy will strengthen the foundations of a thriving Pomona community. Campaign investments will support the Center for Athletics, Recreation and Wellness as a hub for movement, connection and well-being; expand access to health insurance so students can get the care they need; and advance health and wellness initiatives for students, faculty and staff, including efforts to build a thriving workplace culture. Together, these investments recognize a simple truth: people do their best thinking, learning and creating when they have the support to thrive.

470,000—
and
Counting

Since opening its doors, the Center for Athletics, Recreation and Wellness (CARW) has welcomed more than 470,000 visits, a powerful measure of how philanthropy can transform daily life at Pomona. More than a place to exercise, the CARW has become a crossroads for the College: a place where students, faculty and staff gather, recharge, compete and connect. Its extraordinary use demonstrates what the campaign is already achieving—investing in spaces that strengthen well-being, belonging and community for everyone at Pomona.



Connecting Across Lifetimes

A Pomona education does not end at Commencement. It grows and deepens over time.

One of Pomona’s greatest strengths is the willingness of Sagehens to invest in those who follow. Through *Originals*, Pomona will double alumni engagement while creating more opportunities for graduates to mentor students, create internships, share expertise, return as teachers and open doors to careers and experiences.

These relationships help students test ideas in the world, discover new paths and imagine futures they may never have considered.

They also give alumni meaningful ways to stay connected and give back.

Campaign investments will expand the Return to Pomona Scholar program, extramural research opportunities and career development, creating more ways for students to learn from alumni and gain experience beyond the classroom.

When Sagehens invest in Sagehens, everyone benefits.



A Network that Opens Doors

“One trait you’ll see among Pomona students is that whatever they do, they do it in an original way,” says Sebastian Fish Mathurin ’26. He sees that same spirit in alumni: “the passion, the drive, but also the curiosity and the ability to remain a student throughout life.”



Sebastian experienced that connection firsthand through Trustee Aditya Sood ’97, president of Lord Miller and executive producer of films including *Deadpool* and *Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse*. Their mentorship led to a summer internship at Lord Miller—and Pomona funding helped make it possible.

A stipend from the Career Development Office and Pomona College Internship Program enabled Sebastian to remain in California and take advantage of an opportunity he otherwise might not have been able to pursue. The experience showed Sebastian what can happen when generations of Sagehens invest in one another: alumni open doors, Pomona helps students walk through them and new possibilities take shape.

When Sagehens invest in Sagehens, everyone benefits.

Ensuring Pomona Endures

Pomona’s defining strengths are the result of generations of vision, generosity and leadership.

The strongest institutions do more than endure.

They evolve. They adapt. They lead. This campaign will ensure that Pomona remains among the world’s most influential liberal arts colleges while expanding its capacity to shape the future.

That future will be built, as Pomona always has been, gift by gift and generation by generation. As Vice President for Advancement Maria Watson says, “At Pomona, generosity has always been an act of optimism: a belief in students we may never meet, discoveries we cannot yet imagine and a College that will keep evolving long after we are gone.”

The Pomona Annual Fund, the Pomona Plan and legacy gifts are key parts of the *Originals* campaign: resources that will sustain the people, programs and possibilities at the heart of the College while creating a strong foundation for generations of Sagehens still to come.



The Originality of the Pomona Plan

Pomona was an original in planned giving, too. Developed in the 1940s by Allen F. Hawley, Class of 1916, the Pomona Plan pioneered a model in which donors could receive lifetime income and tax benefits while ultimately supporting the College—a concept that became a model for institutions nationwide. Today, it remains one of higher education’s most respected life-income programs. As Senior Director of the Pomona Plan Art Landerholm ’92 puts it, “It’s a distinctly Pomona idea: a financial, tax and philanthropic ‘win-win’ for the College and generations of participants.”

Meet the Campaign Chairs

Sam ’04 and Emily ’04 Glick have been part of each other’s Pomona story since meeting during their first year on campus and flirting in James Irvine Professor of Economics Eleanor P. Brown’s class as seniors. Now they are returning to help write the College’s next chapter as campaign chairs. We asked them to fill in the blanks.

Our Pomona meet-cute started with...

Emily: A textbook. I needed the most expensive book on my list—about \$110—and Sam had already taken the class and still had his copy. I figured if I borrowed his, I could save the money and buy him lunch as a thank you. We were both so busy that lunch kept getting rescheduled, until it finally became dinner—and then 11 hours of talking. We started dating about three weeks before graduation, and here we are.

A Pomona moment we still think about...

Emily: I received an Iberian Grant, funded by an alumna, for independent study in Spain. I lived in Madrid and studied what the Spanish government was doing to help people experiencing homelessness, creating a black-and-white photo essay and written report. It was a lesson in independence, among other things—you had to find a roommate, figure out your international cellphone and make your own way. I learned about poverty and about telling people’s stories without exploiting them. But mostly, I learned I could land in another country, figure things out and do something I hadn’t done before.

Sam: In a class on medieval mystery plays, we had to enact a scene where a woman throws her baby over a balcony. We did it from the second floor of the Smith Campus Center—with a small watermelon wrapped up like a baby. It was a pretty gory moment. But we were learning how to draw emotions out of people and think about how audiences hundreds of years ago might have experienced the story. I still think about the lesson on how you can have a serious impact on people with limited resources through commitment and ingenuity.

The thing about Pomona that’s hard to explain until you’ve experienced it...

Sam: Every moment at Pomona is part of that Pomona education. I started learning from Day One through late-night dorm hallway conversations with my sponsor group. I had the opportunity to sit on a presidential search committee as a student, and that was part of my education. Doing summer research with faculty was part of my education. And then every course I took—from general education requirements to intense courses in my major to classes I chose on a whim because they looked interesting—helped me gain new perspectives and connect dots across topics I might never have thought were related.



What motivates us to lead the campaign is...

Emily: There is a sense of community and commonality. And even if you weren’t on campus at the same time or you’re in a different career field, I think Sagehens find a togetherness through a similar mindset and a similar set of values. The campaign is a little like showing up at a wedding where everyone cares about the couple getting married. Love is in the air. It is a sense of we’re all here to promote a good thing that we believe in.

The campaign priority that gets us up in the morning is...

Emily: The recruitment, retention and success of students from middle-income families. Talented students from families of every income level need to know that they should apply, and that attending and successfully graduating from Pomona is achievable for them.

Sam: I agree. Pomona is for everybody. For someone who is qualified and can benefit from a Pomona education, there should be no financial barrier to them getting that education. Period.

Pomona College Campaign Committee*

Sam ’04 and Emily ’04 Glick, *Chairs*
Janet Inskeep Benton ’79
Ranney E. Draper ’60
Wei Hopeman ’92 P’28
Robert “Bobby” Lee ’02
Wendell Jackson “Jack” and Carolyn Long P’13 ’15
Steven Olson P’23 ’26
G. Gabrielle Starr
James “Jim” Valone ’85
Eileen Wilson-Oyelaran ’69

*As of September 1, 2026

Originals Are Coming Your Way

The Campaign for Pomona College is taking flight. Join fellow Sagehens, families and friends across the country and around the world to celebrate *Originals*, connect with the Pomona community and hear how the campaign is shaping what comes next for the College. Mark your calendar and watch for more details:

San Francisco November 4, 2026	Chicago May 18, 2027
Los Angeles February 11, 2027	New York City May 20, 2027
Asia March 29– April 2, 2027	

Wherever Sagehens gather, original thinking follows. We hope you'll be part of it.

pomona.edu/originals/events



4 Important Facts

1. The campaign's reach is College-wide.
Originals is an investment in the whole Pomona experience—from financial aid and faculty to global learning, wellness, career exploration and the resources that sustain the College. Together, these priorities strengthen the interconnected experiences that allow students to thrive.

2. Its impact extends beyond our gates.
A Pomona education was never meant to stay in Claremont. Sagehens carry what they learn into laboratories, classrooms, boardrooms, studios, communities and public life—bringing independent thinking, intellectual curiosity and a distinctly collaborative approach to challenges that matter.

3. It doubles down on the Pomona you love.
This campaign isn't about reinventing Pomona. It's about investing more deeply in what makes Pomona original: extraordinary students and faculty, learning at a human scale, close relationships, intellectual risk-taking and a community where people challenge and care for one another.

4. We all can help.
There is no single way to be part of *Originals*. Give. Volunteer. Mentor a student. Attend an event. Reconnect with classmates. Share your Pomona pride. Every act of participation strengthens the community—and helps create possibilities for the Sagehens who come next.

7 Gifts Making an Impact

From opening gates for students to advancing bold ideas, creating new opportunities and investing in the College for generations to come, every gift has a story—and a purpose. Here are seven *Originals* leading the way.

1. Open the world
Bill Riley P'26
A \$1 million commitment to the Center for Global Engagement will help bring the world to Pomona—and Pomona to the world.

2. Expand access
Anonymous
A \$2.5 million family gift will strengthen technology and access, helping ensure students have the tools they need to take full advantage of a Pomona education.

3. Open doors around the world
Wei Z. Hopeman '92 P'28 and David Basmajian P'28
A \$1 million gift established an endowed family fund for global internships, launching the Pomona College Global Internship Program and expanding opportunities for students to learn and gain experience around the world.

4. Put Pomona within reach
Lauri M. Steel '67
A commitment to scholarships will help make a Pomona education possible for talented students, regardless of their financial circumstances.

5. Invest for generations
Ruth '68 and Richard Ault
Through the Pomona Plan and legacy giving, the Aults are putting \$3 million to work for Pomona's future—and demonstrating the lasting power of planned gifts.

6. Make a transformational commitment
Janet Inskeep Benton '79
A \$10 million commitment to the Center for Global Engagement is helping bring a vibrant new residential community to life, adding 60 beds and creating new opportunities for students to live, learn and grow together.

7. Give 47 at a time
Ryan Luo '16
Luo's connection to Pomona keeps multiplying. After launching the Pomona College Hackathon as a student, he later hired fellow Sagehen Sam Malik '24 at his company, AegisAI. Today, he stays connected to the Computer Science Department—and supports its students and faculty with a recurring gift of, naturally, \$47 a month.

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?



These Sagehens, original thinkers all, turned blue sky thinking into the real deal.

BY JUDY HILL
ILLUSTRATIONS
BY DARIA KIRPACH

IT'S NOT ENOUGH
TO HAVE A GOOD IDEA,
THOUGH IT'S A GOOD START.

What follows that moment of inspired thinking is what really matters. Will that precious germ of an idea shrivel on the vine, or will it flourish and bear dazzling fruit? That, of course, depends on myriad factors—timing, talent, toil, grit. A dash of good fortune?

In the following pages, we present a baker's dozen of Pomona alums who took their boundary-pushing ideas and ran with them, turning inspired dreams into lasting realities. Some of our visionaries created something entirely new; others solved an intractable problem, inspired vital change, transformed our perceptions, or simply made an aspect of daily life so, so much better. All our idea makers have made an outsized impact in their field, the ripples of their achievements fanning out far and wide into the world at large.

Pomona College has been nurturing innovative thinkers for well over a century now, and the Sagehens we recognize here represent just a fraction of a much longer list that could have filled many issues of the magazine. We hope you'll let us know who else we should have included.



R. STANTON AVERY '32
Inventor/Businessman

The Big Idea:
INVENT SELF-ADHESIVE LABELS

Growing up poor in Oklahoma during the Great Depression, R. Stanton Avery went on to create a global company and invent a revolutionary technology—the self-adhesive label. Labels had existed before, of course, but those required moistening or gluing. Avery's inspired concept was to create a sticker that was pressure sensitive, self-adhering and resealable. He created his first set of labels soon after graduating from Pomona, with a \$100 loan from his future wife Dorothy Durfee and a combination of used machine parts and a saber saw, from which he crafted a rudimentary die-cut labeling machine. In 1935, he founded Avery Adhesives, a small company in Los Angeles that grew into Avery Dennison, a global Fortune 500 company. Avery's invention forever changed the world of packaging, retail and shipping, making it feasible to apply large numbers of labels quickly and affordably.

Pomona
College has
been nurturing
innovative
thinkers for
well over a
century now.

SHARON CAMP '65
Public Policy Expert

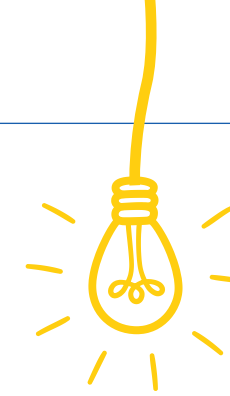
The Big Idea:
**GET EMERGENCY
CONTRACEPTION
DIRECTLY TO WOMEN
WHO NEED IT**

Known as the “Mother of Plan B,” Sharon Camp led the effort to develop and launch the emergency contraceptive in the U.S. Before Camp committed herself to the cause, major pharmaceutical companies in the U.S., fearing potential backlash, had shied away from developing and marketing emergency contraception. Camp, who previously led a nonprofit focused on reproductive health, had seen firsthand the harm caused by poor reproductive care in developing nations and knew the importance of getting contraception directly into the hands of women and making abortion safer. In the late 1980s, she worked to bring Mifepristone to the U.S. and a decade later founded Women's Capital Corporation as a three-person startup, overcoming a slew of hurdles to develop and commercialize Plan B—the so-called “morning after” pill. Bridging research, public policy and pharmaceutical development, Camp, who died in 2025, transformed access to emergency contraception, impacting millions of women's lives.

JAMES TURRELL '65
Artist

The Big Idea:
MAKE ART OUT OF LIGHT

Not content with limiting himself to traditional materials—paint, metal, wood, stone—James Turrell chose light itself as his sculptural medium, launching a lifelong artistic investigation into the very nature of perception. A pioneer of the California Light and Space Movement of the 1960s, Turrell has created immersive installations around the world that employ light as a tool to alter how we sense space, depth, color and form. Most famous are his Skyspaces (including our very own in Draper Courtyard), which open up to the sky and, with programmed lighting at dawn and sunset, offer a profound, perception-altering experience for those seated below. Turrell also has been working since 1977 on turning an extinct volcanic crater in Arizona into a naked-eye observatory that connects visitors with celestial events and the cosmos.



GARY ACOSTA '85
Entrepreneur

The Big Idea:
**EXPAND LATINO
WEALTH AND BUSINESS
OWNERSHIP**

As an advocate for Latino wealth creation, Gary Acosta wears many hats. He is co-founder and CEO of the National Association of Hispanic Real Estate Professionals (NAHREP), the nation's largest Latino business organization, with around 100 chapters across the U.S. Acosta also is a founding partner of venture capital fund L'ATTITUDE Ventures, which invests exclusively in Latino-led companies, and he is a founder of the Hispanic Wealth Project, dedicated to increasing household wealth and economic mobility in the Latino community. Through his entrepreneurship, investing and public policy work, Acosta has become one of the nation's most influential advocates for Latino economic advancement. While at Pomona, Acosta played varsity basketball under future NBA Hall of Fame coach Gregg Popovich, and he has said his mentor's intensity and consistent commitment to excellence has stayed with him.



JENNIFER
DOUDNA '85
Biochemist

The Big Idea:
**TAKE GENE
EDITING
TO THE
NEXT LEVEL**

In 2020, Jennifer Doudna's work co-inventing CRISPR-Cas9, a breakthrough method of gene editing that allows scientists to make precise changes to DNA, received the highest of accolades, a Nobel Prize in chemistry. The technique Doudna and her collaborator, Emmanuelle Charpentier, created has transformed science by making gene editing faster, less expensive and more accurate. It is now a standard tool in genetics, biotech and biomedical research. CRISPR can treat genetic diseases by correcting errors in DNA and treatments using the “genetic scissors” have already been approved for patients with sickle-cell disease. It also shows potential for treating cancer and inherited disorders. Beyond medicine, CRISPR is being used to improve crops and better understand how genes function in plants, animals and humans.

STEPHEN
SMITH '17
*Health Care
Entrepreneur*

The Big Idea:
**MAKE OCD THERAPY
ACCESSIBLE
AND AFFORDABLE**

After struggling for many years with undiagnosed obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), Stephen Smith eventually found help through exposure and response prevention (ERP) therapy, a type of cognitive behavioral therapy now considered the gold standard for treating the condition. Knowing that many with OCD face long delays in getting an accurate diagnosis or evidence-based treatment, Smith co-founded NOCD, a digital community and telehealth platform that offers OCD prevention and management therapy. The service officially launched in 2017, the same year Smith (a transfer student and Sagehen football player) graduated from Pomona. The company has since grown into the world's largest OCD specialty telehealth provider, with more than a million therapy sessions annually and 140 million people able to access it through their insurance. Recently, NOCD acquired a PTSD-focused platform, launching a parent brand called NOTO, with comedian Howie Mandel—who also lives with OCD—as its spokesperson.

MAYA HORGAN FAMODU '13

Venture Capitalist

The Big Idea:

RE-ENVISION INVESTING IN AFRICAN COMPANIES

A two-time Forbes 30 Under 30 honoree, venture capital investor Maya Horgan Famodu has been named a Most Influential Person of African Descent by the United Nations and a Young Global Leader by the World Economic Forum. The Nigerian American entrepreneur, who grew up poor in a trailer park in rural Minnesota, founded her investment fund Ingressive Capital in Lagos, Nigeria, at the age of 25. Since then, she has been a powerful force in building Africa's technology startup ecosystem and increasing access to early-stage venture capital for African founders. Key to her success has been her ability to persuade influential investors in Silicon Valley and around the world to pay attention to the continent's tech sector and consider it worthy of investment. Famodu also is helping to prepare tomorrow's tech workers through Ingressive for Good, a nonprofit she co-founded that provides scholarships, technical training and career opportunities for young Africans pursuing technology careers.



JEAN MILL '48

Conservationist

The Big Idea:

DEVELOP A NEW BREED OF DOMESTICATED CAT

When Jean Mill set out to develop an entirely new breed of cat, she had a loftier goal in mind than merely creating a beautiful feline. Mill, who studied genetics at UC Davis after graduating from Pomona, was motivated by an interest in conservation. If people could own a domestic cat that looked like a wild leopard cat, she reasoned, there would be less poaching of wild-caught exotic felines. To create a cat with the spotted coat of a wild leopard cat and the tame and friendly nature of a house pet she crossed an Asian leopard cat (*Prionailurus bengalensis*) with domestic cats and then selectively bred the offspring over many generations. Eventually, the bengal cat was recognized as a distinct breed by the International Cat Association. Today, it is one of the most popular and sought after breeds of cat in the world.



ROBERT BLALACK '70

Visual Effects Artist

The Big Idea:

CREATE "IMPOSSIBLE" VISUAL EFFECTS

Anyone who has seen the first *Star Wars* movie has witnessed the jaw-dropping work of Robert Blalack. A trailblazing visual effects artist, Blalack co-founded Industrial Light & Magic (ILM) and helped create many of the modern visual effects techniques that have transformed filmmaking. His work on *Star Wars*, which immersed audiences

in a believable world of spacecraft battles and glowing lightsabers, won him an Oscar for Best Visual Effects in 1978. Blalack, who began developing his filmmaking skills while at Pomona, is known as much for the processes he developed as he is for specific techniques. Before ILM came on the scene, visual effects consisted of hundreds of individual effects created shot by shot. Blalack and ILM figured out how to scale the process and combine multiple film elements into a convincing final shot. The workflows ILM developed—where separate elements are created, tracked, composited and integrated through a standardized pipeline—laid the groundwork for modern VFX studios.

MIKEY DICKERSON '01

Software Engineer

The Big Idea:

MODERNIZE GOVERNMENT SOFTWARE

If you tried to sign up for "Obamacare" health insurance in 2013, when HealthCare.gov went online, you might have experienced glitches with a website that crashed within hours of launching and seemed doomed to failure. Enter Mikey Dickerson, then a site reliability engineer at Google, who was brought in to overhaul the government website. The recovery team he headed up stabilized and rebuilt the system, allowing millions of people to sign up for health insurance. In 2014, President Barack Obama appointed him as the first administrator of the U.S. Digital Service, a new department designed to improve government technology. By bringing the same engineering standards that Silicon Valley was already using—modern software engineering, user-focused design, rapid iteration—to government systems, Dickerson changed government technology. He came back to Pomona as a professor of practice from 2021 to 2024, teaching a popular computer science elective called Managing Complex Systems.



Evers-Williams has advocated powerfully for civic engagement, voting rights and equal opportunities for all people.

MYRLIE EVERS-WILLIAMS '68

Civil Rights Activist

The Big Idea:

PUSH FORWARD THE GOALS OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Myrlie Evers-Williams arrived at Pomona to begin a new life as a student and young widow with three children a year after the 1963 assassination of her husband, civil rights leader Medgar Evers. She would go on to chair the NAACP from 1995 to 1998 and to give the invocation at President Barack Obama's second inauguration in 2013, the first woman and layperson to do so. For more than three decades, Evers-Williams sought punishment for her husband's murderer, efforts that finally led to a successful murder conviction in 1994. Through her speeches, writing and public service, Evers-Williams has advocated powerfully for civic engagement, voting rights and equal opportunities for all people. In 2023, Evers-Williams donated her archival collection of papers and other memorabilia to Pomona, making them available to future scholars and the public.

WATCH THIS SPACE

These young Sagehens are making waves and getting noticed.



Donny Lu '26

PASSION: TECHNOLOGY

After wide-ranging academic exploration at Pomona, Donny Lu decided in his sophomore year to major in physics, finishing his degree requirements in a year before heading to Caltech for a 3/2 program in engineering. Now living in San Francisco, he has launched Dlab Sciences, a startup that aims to automate the tool-and die-making process to build hardware more economically.



Isha Raheja '27

PASSION: ENVIRONMENTALISM

As well as bringing a beehive to the Pomona College Organic Farm, Isha Raheja has secured a contract with LA Metro to provide all 5C students with free transit access. Raheja is also head of Recoop and the Free Room, which has diverted 27,546 lbs of waste—clothes, shoes, furniture, books—and redistributed them to students and community organizations.



Devansh Taliyan '27

PASSION: ENTREPRENEURSHIP

At the age of 16, Devansh Taliyan introduced India's first carbon-neutral soap, crafted by women from Mulshi Valley. At Pomona, he led the first student-run accelerator at Claremont Colleges. He has also developed apps to connect students with tutors; to encourage real-life encounters; and to help medical clinics get every dollar they are owed by insurance companies.

HOYLE SCHWEITZER '55

Surfer and Businessman

The Big Idea:

**TRANSFORM WINDSURFING
INTO A GLOBAL SPORT**

Surfer Hoyle Schweitzer, who died this year at age 93, may not have invented windsurfing, but he did turn it into a global cultural phenomenon. While the idea of attaching a sail to a board had been around since the 1950s, Schweitzer and engineer Jim Drake developed and patented the first commercial Windsurfer sailboard—a board with an asymmetrical sail, a hand-held boom and a mast attached with a universal joint—in the late 1960s. With impressive business and marketing acumen, Schweitzer (with his wife Diane) whipped up interest and turned windsurfing into a hugely popular water sport enjoyed by millions during the 1970s and '80s. Competitions, magazines and schools all devoted to the wind-powered board followed in the wake of Schweitzer's entrepreneurial brilliance, and in 1984 windsurfing became the youngest sport ever to be included in the Olympic Games. Modern wind-powered sports such as kitesurfing and foiling owe a direct debt to the windsurfer and to Schweitzer's invitation to the world to hop onboard and ride the wind.



**Countries
outside the
traditional tech
centers, Okolo
insists, should
be included
in AI policy
discussions.**

**CHINASA
T. OKOLO '18**

AI Strategist

The Big Idea:

**MAKE AI MORE
EQUITABLE
AND INCLUSIVE**

Chinasa T. Okolo, a Nigerian American computer scientist, has been named one of the most influential people in artificial intelligence by *Time* and included on *Forbes'* inaugural 30 Under 30 in AI list. Okolo, who has consulted for the United Nations and the World Bank and contributed to the International Scientific Report on the Safety of Advanced AI and Nigeria's national AI strategy, argues that AI must do a better job serving Africa and other parts of the Global South. Countries outside the traditional tech centers, she insists, should be included at the table in policy discussions determining the future of AI. Her research, much of it in the field, explores how people in low-resource settings, including frontline health care workers in rural India, interact with AI and how AI systems can be designed to be more understandable and useful for everyday users.

Alumni News

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UPCOMING EVENTS

2026

**John A. Payton '73 Distinguished
Lectureship featuring Henry Louis Gates Jr.**
October 24

2027

Regional Winter Break Parties
January

Pomona College Giving Day
March 3-March 4
Save the Date: For 24 hours, Sagehens everywhere will come together to shape students' tomorrows.

Alumni Weekend
April 29-May 2
Start making plans for your trip back to the nest. Registration opens February 2027.

Visit our website for more events happening in your neck of the woods.
pomona.edu/regional-chapters

A Message from the Alumni Association Board President

If you asked me about my Pomona origin story, I'd take you back to the day I received my acceptance letter from Dean Bruce Poch. At the end was a handwritten note detailing my application and experience. No other admission letter had a personal touch. Pomona, a place I couldn't even afford to visit, showed what it meant to be a small liberal arts college.



That's one reason the theme of Originals resonates deeply with me. It celebrates what makes Pomona special: creating a place where you're recognized for who you are and who you are becoming. This is a difficult task, and Pomona delivers.

Like all Sagehens, that was made possible by alumni and donors whose generosity helped me say "Yes!" to Pomona after the College said yes to me. My family couldn't fully pay for Pomona. I took out loans, earned scholarships and, most important, received generous financial aid, thanks to those who came before me.

Now, I give for those whose origin stories are just being written. Today's students are tomorrow's entrepreneurs, doctors, teachers and leaders, and each of us has a role in ensuring these Originals can say "yes," too. I hope you'll join me in supporting them.

Chirp!

Robi Ganguly '00
President,
Pomona College Alumni Association Board
alumni.board.president@pomona.edu



Caryl McNeilly '79 (left), Nina Ye '24 (second to right) and Frank Albinder '80 (right) roll up their sleeves for the annual 4-7 Day of Service, helping clean up their local community during a neighborhood trash pickup.

Sagehens Find Community in the Nation's Capital

By Christy McCarthy

After graduation, Nina Ye '24 was eager to put her politics, philosophy and economics degree to good use when she moved across the country to Washington, D.C., for a role in the federal government. But in less than a year, her career came to a sudden halt when the agency was affected by mass layoffs.

As federal workforce reductions reshaped the region, a career networking event with the Pomona College Washington, D.C. Regional Chapter became more than a professional gathering. For those like Ye navigating an uncertain time, it offered the comfort of a Pomona community 2,600 miles from campus.

"I had only been out of college for a year, so finding a village of Sagehens who genuinely wanted to help each other made D.C. feel like home," Ye says.

That sense of belonging is at the heart of Pomona's regional chapters. Part intellectual community, part social network and part touchstone, the chapters create places for Sagehens to carry the College wherever they go.

However, few places demonstrate that quite like Washington, D.C.

Reestablished in 2023, the D.C. chapter has grown into a thriving Sagehen community of more than 1,000 alumni and 100 family members of current students within a 60-mile area of the nation's

capital. It is one of Pomona's 10 regional chapters, which are open to alumni and families alike and designed to help Sagehens stay connected to the College and one another.

At any Washington event, a Sagehen who arrived weeks ago might find themselves talking with a 40-year resident. Journalists meet lawyers; public servants mentor students; graduates from the 1970s trade stories with those who left campus only months ago.

For chapter chair Teresa Kwong '91, that is what makes it so distinctive.

"This city is a place of comings and goings, but Pomona gives us a shared foundation—you can quickly walk in a room and feel like you've found your people," she says.

Kwong is part of the chapter's seven-member leadership committee, along with Caryl McNeilly '79; Frank Albinder '80; Amy Van Buren Rhodes '07; Marc Rod '20; Daniel Silverman '19; and Ye. Their lives and careers have taken markedly different paths, but Kwong says they each bring something different to the community they are building together.

That range is reflected in the chapter's programming, too. Events have explored topics from human trafficking to election analysis to international affairs, as well as service and networking events.

For Rod, a senior congressional reporter, he points to a chapter event featuring Pomona Politics Professor Mietek P. Boduszyński and his work on Ukraine-related issues at the Department of Defense as one example of how the chapter helps extend the College's intellectual life far beyond the classroom.

McNeilly, who moved to D.C. in 1980, says she has found particular value in the chance to meet Sagehens whose experiences differ from her own, calling these connections "invaluable."

The chapter's leadership committee hopes for even more of these encounters in the years ahead. Kwong wants the chapter to grow by bringing new voices into the fold. McNeilly would welcome more visits from Pomona faculty, creating opportunities for lifelong learning. Ye envisions partnerships with other chapters, including New York, that could bring Sagehens together across an even wider geography.

"I've seen firsthand how, when life takes an unexpected turn, this community shows up and has a way of helping people rediscover what it means to be a Sagehen," says Ye.

For a city of arrivals and departures, those connections take on particular meaning: someone is always new, while someone else always knows the way around. And in the span of one gathering, Sagehens whose lives might otherwise never intersect find themselves flocking to a nest entirely their own.

Interested in joining a regional chapter in your area? Visit our website to find one near you: pomona.edu/regional-chapters.



↑ (From left to right) Netta Kaplan '20 and Marc Rod '20 meet current student Jefferson Wright '28 at last year's Winter Break Party, where Sagehens from different generations came together.



↑ (From left to right) Mercedes Fitchett '91, chapter Chair Teresa Kwong '91 and Martina Vandenberg '90 reconnect at an event where Vandenberg shared insights from her work combating human trafficking.



↑ Nina Ye '24 (left) joins fellow D.C.-area Sagehens Olivia Truesdale SC '21 and Emily Petro '21 for an evening of reconnecting at last year's winter party.

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ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

In the Groove

By Judy Hill

By the time you read this, Keith Murray '99 and Chris Cain '99, aka the indie rock band We Are Scientists, will be deep into a North American tour that has them criss-crossing the nation (and Canada) from Chicago to Seattle to San Antonio to Vancouver, and many parts in between, before winding up in Toronto on December 5. This musical whirlwind comes on the heels of a festival tour in the U.K. and Spain that took up much of their summer.

Twenty years on from their breakout 2005 album *With Love and Squalor*, and with nine studio albums under their belts (including last year's *Qualifying Miles*), the New York City-based band—known for frenetic rhythms, punchy hooks and witty phrasing—shows no signs of slowing down. Being on the road, they say, is as much fun as ever.

“I think the good elements of being on tour are amplified in our band,” says Murray, who met Cain when they were both undergraduates at Pomona, where they united over a love of comedy. “Most bands don’t really socialize with one another the way we do.”

When they’re back home, says Cain, “the thing that keeps the job fun is continuing to push ourselves as songwriters and recording artists.” Songwriting actually has become more enjoyable over the years, he notes. When they were first trying to break into the New York music scene, “writing a bad song felt like the end of the world.” Two decades later, more prolific and more adept, they can immerse themselves in the flow of creativity with less angst.

Though neither has become rich from their musical career, they both say they’re happy with how things turned out—partly due to the values and reverence for the arts they learned at Pomona.

“I certainly wouldn’t trade my lifestyle for one that involved more wealth and less personal interest and satisfaction inherently woven into what I do every day,” says Murray. “So, in some ways, maybe we’re the richest men of them all.”

Learn more at wearescientists.com. [PCM](#)

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Breaking the Code

By Judy Hill



This has been an eventful year for journalist and author Jeff Horwitz '03.

In May, along with fellow Reuters reporter Engen Tham, he won the 2026 Pulitzer Prize in the Beat Reporting category for his “inventive and revelatory reporting on Meta,” which detailed the social media company’s willingness to expose users, including children, to scams and AI manipulation.

Horwitz, who lives in the Bay Area, says he “never expected to be in contention” for the prize and was “gratified and delighted.” He also admits that winning the award is “a pretty strong recipe for some incoming imposter syndrome” as he contemplates where to focus his reporting gaze next.

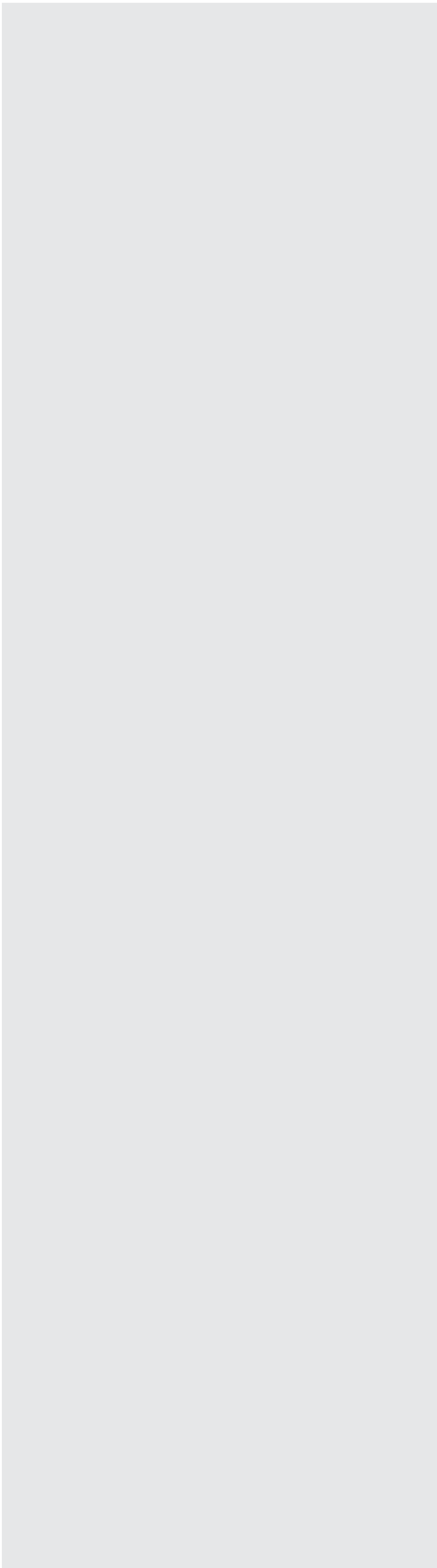
This fall, his 2023 book *Broken Code: Inside Facebook and the Fight to Expose Its Toxic Secrets*, which also focuses on how Meta placed profits above civic conscience, hits movie screens as the basis for *The Social Reckoning*, a follow-up to Aaron Sorkin’s *Social Network*. The new movie, released on October 9, dramatizes the 2021 Facebook leak by whistleblower Frances Haugen as reported by Horwitz in “The Facebook Files” for *The Wall Street Journal*.

As Horwitz recounts, he was first approached by Sony before the book was even published. “These things are wildly speculative,” he says, and it was only last year that it started seeming like it might happen. Conversations with Sorkin ensued, though Horwitz is quick to point out that while the movie is inspired by his book, Sorkin “worked with the story as he wanted to tell it, and that is just fine by me.”

Jeremy Allen White, known to many as Chef Carmy in the popular comedy-drama *The Bear*, plays Horwitz, with Mikey Madison (*Anora*) in the role of Frances Haugen and Jeremy Strong (*Succession*) as Mark Zuckerberg.

The experience of being played by a Hollywood actor, Horwitz says, has been “bizarre” and he finds it “deeply amusing to be played by an extremely sexy man.”

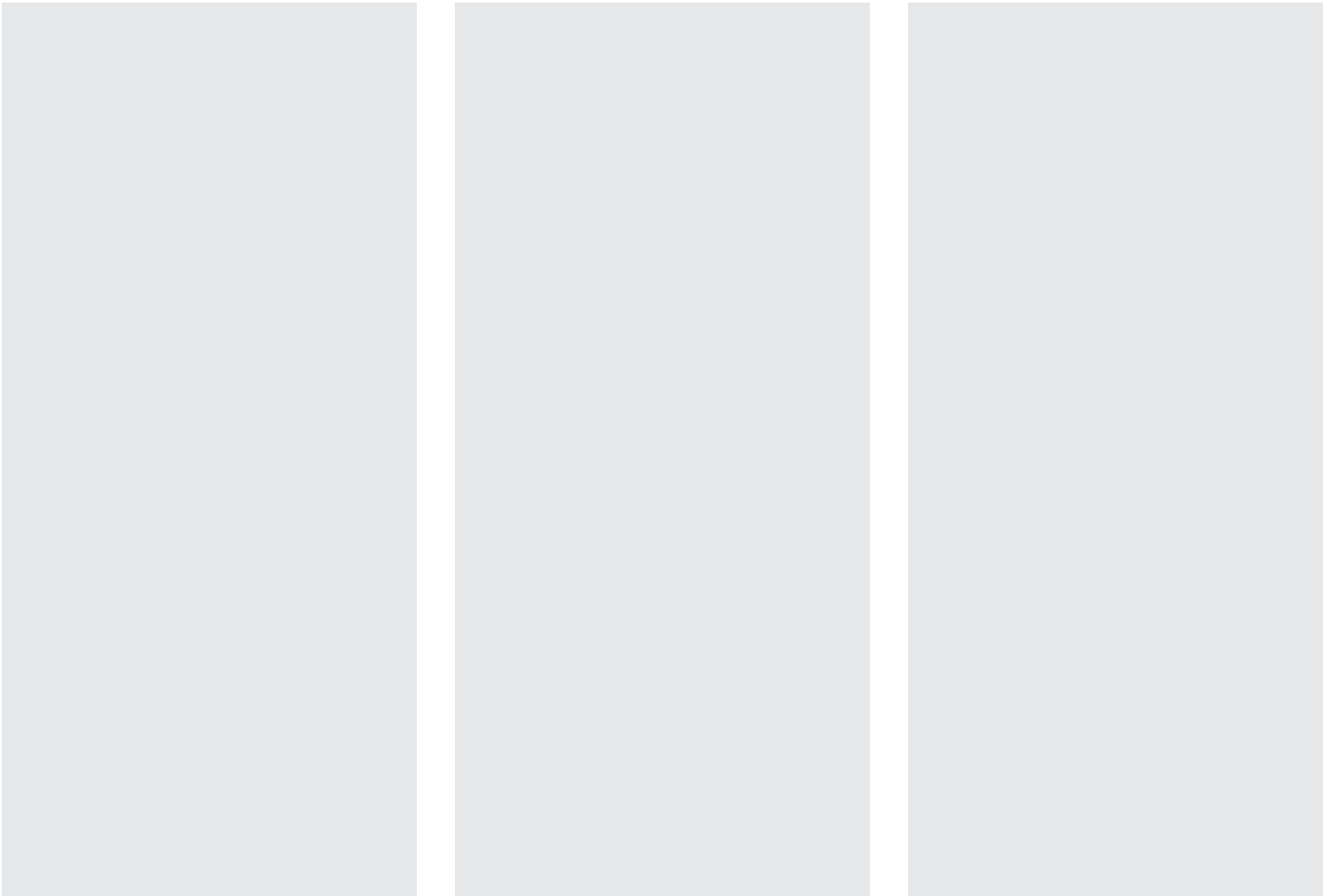
“The Hollywood stuff as a whole has been interesting and fun to see,” he says, but he has tried to keep “a moderate distance.” Meanwhile, new topics—some related to climate change, some around AI—vie for his journalistic attention. [PCM](#)



To view notes online, visit sagehenconnect.pomona.edu



Page 54 Crossword Puzzle Solution



To view notes online, visit
sagehenconnect.pomona.edu

When Malu Estoducto '27 arrived at Pomona College from Brazil, she found a community that nurtures her curiosity and helps her grow. Now, as ASPC president, she's cultivating the same for her fellow Sagehens.

"Pomona has opened the door to opportunities I never thought possible, from studying abroad to serving in student leadership, and has allowed me to pursue my dreams without financial barriers."

— Malu Estoducto '27
(seated in wheelbarrow)



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Gurnee Fellows Hart

1929–2026

This spring, Pomona College President G. Gabrielle Starr shared the following message with the community.

It is with profound sadness that I share the news of the passing of Trustee Emeritus Gurnee Hart '51. Gurnee departed peacefully on May 22, leaving a legacy defined by wisdom, generosity and an abiding love for Pomona College that spanned more than seven decades.



A proud member of the Class of 1951, Gurnee earned his bachelor's in economics, was elected to Phi Beta Kappa and carried the spirit of a Pomona education for the rest of his life. After serving our country in the U.S. Army during the Korean War, Gurnee went on to earn his MBA at Stanford—and from there had a distinguished career culminating as partner at Scudder, Stevens & Clark before retiring in 1994.

Yet for Gurnee, achievements were never an end in themselves. It was always about being in service of something larger. In retirement, he became a visiting scholar at Jesus College, University of Cambridge—one of our partner schools—and went on to serve as a founding chairman of Cambridge in America. He lent his quiet and steady leadership to the boards of the New York Philharmonic and the French Heritage Society, among several other institutions.

To the College, Gurnee gave everything a person can give: his time, his counsel and his treasure. He served on the Board of Trustees for 18 years, and continued as an engaged trustee emeritus long after, serving on the finance and advancement committees, in addition to co-chairing the Campaign Steering Committee from 1996 to 2002. He participated joyfully on his 40th, 45th and 55th reunion gift committees, and later co-chaired his 60th.

He and his wife, Marjorie Leigh Hart, have contributed more than \$2 million—creating lasting gifts to our community: the Hart Institute for American History and the Gurnee F. Hart '51 College Archives Fund, each a testament to his belief in the importance of remembering and honoring the places we come from. Throughout the decades, they have also been loyal Annual Fund supporters.

Gurnee was, in every sense, the embodiment of what it means to bear added riches beyond the Gates in trust for humankind. He did not simply believe in Pomona's mission—he lived it, in the fullness and generosity of a life well spent.

Our hearts continue to go out to his beloved Marjorie and family, and to all who were fortunate enough to call him a colleague, mentor and friend.

As we remember him, may we honor his life and legacy by carrying forward the example he set throughout his life: bearing his added riches in trust for humankind.

Warm regards,

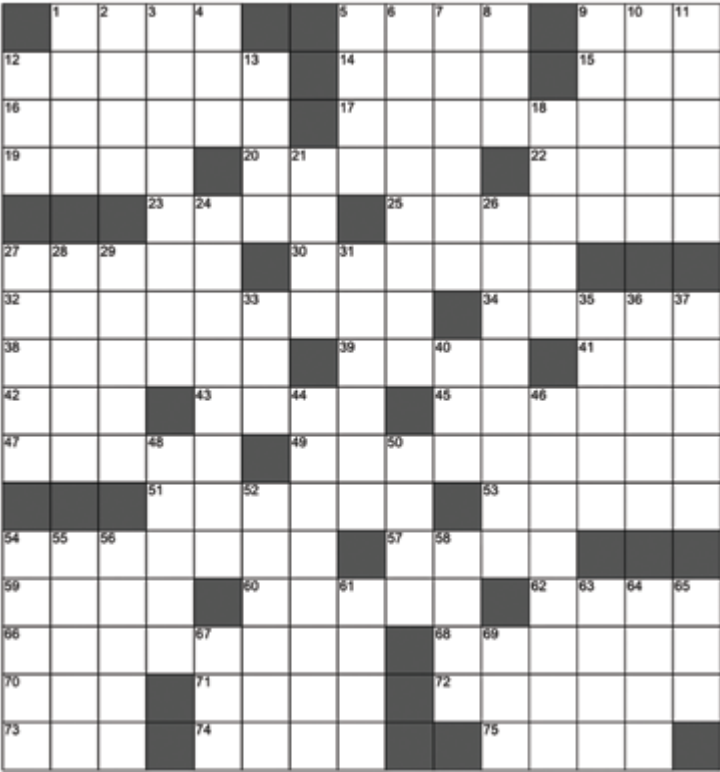
G. Gabrielle Starr, President

Claremont Crawl by Hunter Thu '25

Hunter Thu '25, who majored in physics and minored in math at Pomona, currently works in image processing for a small defense company in Los Angeles. He first got into crosswords, he says, during the summer of 2024 and soon adopted the habit of doing the *The New York Times Crossword* every evening with his mom. “After trying my hand at making a few,” he says, “I present a very topical crossword for all alums that found their way through Claremont. I hope you enjoy!”

ACROSS

- 1. Phone
- 5. Nod off
- 9. Actors need, perhaps
- 12. It hangs from your ear
- 14. Infuriates
- 15. One who does not experience sexual attraction, for short
- 16. Lock in
- 17. *Rapper with nautical flow?
- 19. Refine
- 20. Surname shared by two ex-NBA brothers
- 22. Similar
- 23. God who lost to Hercules in combat
- 25. *19th-century American poet's take on a classic Da Vinci painting?
- 27. Ogle
- 30. Popular rum cocktail
- 32. *"Hey Hollywood Brad, why don't you get the ball over the net for once!"?
- 34. Time of the ball drop in Boise
- 38. Texas governor Greg
- 39. Unaltered
- 41. *Medalla para un ganador*
- 42. *Hermana de la madre*
- 43. Shi'ism and Protestantism, for one
- 45. Sleeve component?
- 47. Used, as a table
- 49. *Expression from a jaded pig looking at its sty?
- 51. Prayer beads used by Catholics
- 53. Like some columns
- 54. *Play books?
- 57. This, in Toledo
- 59. They may charge your remotes



- 60. Modern assessment
- 62. Distant
- 66. Would-be rulers of the pentarchy model of the Christian Church...or a hint to the phonetic interpretation to the starred clues?
- 68. Father to Luke and Leia
- 70. Benz finish?
- 71. Misfortunes
- 72. Teaching methodology in improv
- 73. In the _____
- 74. R&B singer who features on Pitbulls "Time of Our Lives"
- 75. Affliction whose name, when said aloud, contains the organ it affects

DOWN

- 1. Post-Paleozoic predator, for short
- 2. Country whose flag symbolizes the five pillars of Islam
- 3. Come across as
- 4. Unit for sale?
- 5. Vituperate, slangily

- 6. Cookie-based deserts
- 7. Fanatic
- 8. What comes after Vietnam?
- 9. Nutjob
- 10. Trap, as a blizzard
- 11. *Thelma & Louise* star Davis
- 12. Ketchum of Pokemon
- 13. 2010s meme that doubles as a bureaucratic organization
- 18. Mrs. Eisenhower
- 21. Tingly feeling caused by audio stimuli
- 24. A gas station, sometimes
- 26. Sir_____ (name given to a hungry knight, perhaps)
- 27. Skirmishes
- 28. Second-longest bone in the human body
- 29. Hitter's status
- 31. Saga that holds the first and third places on the highest-grossing movies of all time
- 33. Summer on the Seine
- 35. Terse denial

The solution is available on page 47.



We Got You

First-year students pushed beyond their comfort zones and showed up for each other during a rock-climbing trip in the San Bernardino Mountains as part of Orientation Adventure, a Pomona tradition since 1955.



Check out the full project at
magazine.pomona.edu/through-their-eyes



Through Their Eyes

We gave out 20 disposable cameras to first year students to document their first weeks on campus—from move-in to orientation adventure to random moments on campus. When we got the film developed (yes, actual film; yes, we had to wait) we loved what we saw. Grainy film + light leaks + blurry photos = instant nostalgia vibes.





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“Pomona has been an important part of my life for over 50 years. The Pomona Plan allows me to give back in a tangible way while also benefiting me financially.”

—Dodie Bump ’76

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