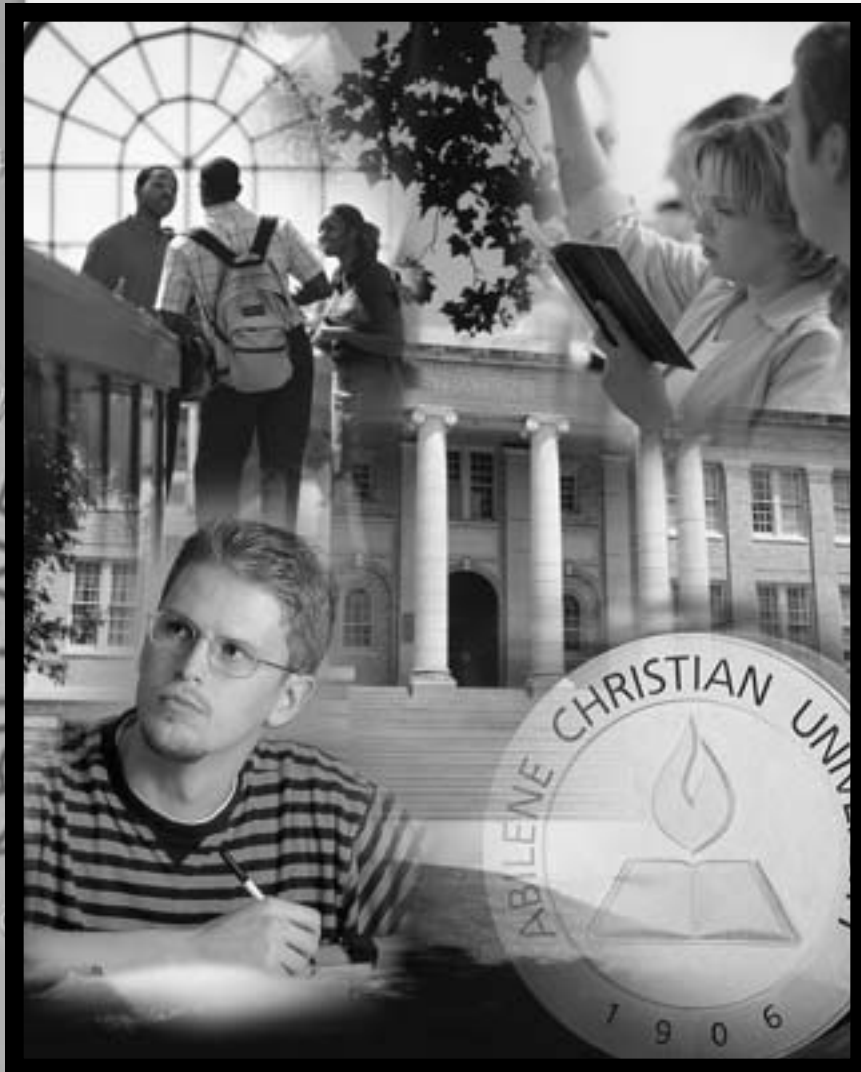


ABILENE
CHRISTIAN
UNIVERSITY

2004

Alumni Awards



Abilene Christian University's 99-year history is distinguished by the accomplishments of graduates who take the university's mission to heart, using their God-given talents as servant-leaders around the world.



OUTSTANDING ALUMNUS OF THE YEAR

Provides timely recognition of the lifetime achievement of an individual who has brought honor to the university through personal and professional excellence and service to the university, the church or the community.

YOUNG ALUMNUS OF THE YEAR

Recognizes professional achievement and/or distinguished service to the university. To be eligible, a recipient must not have reached 40 years of age at the time of nomination.

DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI CITATION

Recognizes distinctive personal or professional achievement that has merited the honor and praise of peers and colleagues. One honoree each is chosen from the College of Biblical Studies, College of Business Administration and College of Arts and Sciences, and one is selected at-large.



David Leeson

In a war replete with ironies, one of the least known is that the Pulitzer Prize-winning photojournalist who covered it hadn't shot a still photograph for his newspaper in three years.

By the time he left in September 2003 to cover the coalition invasion of Iraq, David Leeson of the *Dallas Morning News* had grown more comfortable aiming a Sony video camera than the two digital Canon EOS-1Ds in his equipment bag.

Since 2000, Leeson had become a self-proclaimed research and development futurist for the newspaper, spending long hours shooting and editing tape for short documentaries while dreaming of ways that newspaper, TV and Web technologies could converge in the same newsroom.

A steely veteran of armed conflicts around the globe for more than 20 years, Leeson ('78) had negotiated a deal with his boss: he'd agree to shoot still images in Iraq as an embedded journalist if the *Morning News* also provided a new video camera for his innovation project back home in Dallas.

"My original commitment in Iraq was to still photography. But I insisted on taking a video camera to do a film," Leeson said. "Their concern was that shooting video would interfere with my still photography. I assured them it would not."

Thirteen tapes later and only halfway through his assignment, the prized video camera – wrapped like a mummy in gaffer's tape for protection – fell victim to one too many amber-colored Iraqi sand storms.

Of such misfortune, however, was born enough film for what would become an acclaimed documentary, "Dust to Dust."

And enough still photographs to merit Leeson's first Pulitzer Prize, the top honor in professional journalism.

ACU's 2004 Outstanding Alumnus of the Year had been a Pulitzer finalist in 1986, 1990 and 1995, but admittedly had grown tired of the high-risk assignments – many involving coverage of armed conflict – that complicated his personal and family life.

He asked for a change in responsibilities and got it, becoming one of the first photojournalists at a major U.S. daily newspaper to work exclusively with video. In a short time, he also had grown accustomed to working alone on documentaries, making his own schedule, calling and shooting his own shots.

"No one achieves recognition like this without the support and encouragement and love and instruction of a host of others in one's family as well as one's professional life.

I've been blessed by many people through the years."

— DAVID LEESON



KIM RITZENTHALER

"When I arrived in Iraq, I was concerned about my skills being rusty. Next to staying alive, my first objective was to not embarrass myself," he laughed. "I also wanted to shoot photographs for the sheer joy of it. I know that sounds calloused; I *was* covering a war, after all. But I wanted to shoot photographs exactly as I wanted to shoot them."

An embedded journalist, he was dubbed Combat Dave by the men and women of the Army's Third Division Task Force 2-69 Armored. He wore a helmet and saw a lot of Iraq from the relative security of an M-113 armored personnel carrier he shared with four soldiers while speeding across the desert.

"I was recording a story and relaying it back home, day to day, and enjoying the privilege of having three cameras around my neck. I didn't think about a contest," he said.

"But I will admit that one day near the end of my assignment, I was in Baghdad, shooting extra images, working to fill some 'holes' in my story. I suddenly had the realization that this might be Pulitzer-level material."

It was a short-lived diversionary thought, and Leeson was called quickly back to reality by the dangers surrounding him.

"We had as difficult – or more difficult – war-time conditions as I'd ever experienced, even in the first Gulf War," he said. "Man,

Leeson (CONTINUED)

I was hurtin'. It was the toughest job I've ever had. No bath for six weeks. My socks were so filthy they were stiff, like cardboard, they could stand up by themselves. Before long, even the smell of your own body goes away. And I lost 27 pounds."

The marvel of technology – being able to transmit photographs via phone line from his camera to his computer to the newsdesk on Young Street in Dallas – was sobering.

"I learned a lot about the ethical responsibility of shooting digitally. There is such immediacy," Leeson said. "If I wasn't careful, an image of an American casualty could allow a parent to find out about the tragedy in my photos before being notified officially by the military. The ability of a still photographer to report things immediately is amazing and humbling."

So was news April 5, 2004, of the Pulitzer.

"I spent four days calling people I knew who had loved and supported and encouraged me all these years. I wasn't doing it to boast. I did it to say, 'Thanks'."

A recipient among the first wave of calls was Dr. Charlie Marler ('55), ACU professor emeritus and former chair of the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication.

Another was Don Blakley, a now retired former photo editor of the *Abilene Reporter-News* who first hired Leeson. Blakley then called Gerald Ewing, another former *Reporter-News* photographer who was Leeson's veteran sidekick when the talented but young photographer learned the news business ropes as an ACU student in 1977.

"Don could not believe that David would take the time to call him and thank him," said Ewing, who freelances regularly for ACU. "Don was pretty broken up about it. That was a classy thing for David to do."

"One of my first responses to the Pulitzer news was that I could not feel it was mine alone," Leeson said. "It also belonged to people such as Don and Gerald and Dr. Marler and [former *Reporter-News* editor] Dick Tarpley – people who helped me become who I am today," Leeson said. "No one achieves recognition like this without the support and encouragement and love and instruction of a host of others in one's family as well as one's professional life. I've been blessed

by many people through the years."

Leeson majored in journalism but never shot a photograph for *The Optimist* student newspaper, choosing instead to work part time at the *Reporter-News*.

"I don't have great anecdotes from my time as a student at ACU," Leeson said. "But I learned great lessons that stayed with me."

He recalls writing a story for *The Optimist*



Leeson holds one of his digital cameras while in Baghdad.

TODD ROBERSON, DALLAS MORNING NEWS

about an off-campus crime that befell an ACU student, and remembers how a factual mistake landed him in hot water with the dean of students. "I was mad about it at the time, but years later I read it again and was mortified at what I had done. I learned that my words – the things I wrote and reported – made a difference. They actually have an impact on people's lives."

He also remembers surviving Marler's Communication Law class while learning about ethics and media law.

"I despised it at the time, but I learned a lot," Leeson said. "That was one class you could not coast through. You had to study briefs. Years later, I found myself doing a story for the *Morning News* about inmates on death row. I had to study Supreme Court briefs and realized that Comm Law class helped me develop an analytical approach to reporting."

A true photojournalist, Leeson is finding the film-making world a perfect fit for his skills of articulation. He loves telling stories and illustrating them with images he captures on tape.

And critics have noticed. Six of the seven documentaries he's produced since 2000 have been broadcast on KERA, a regional PBS station based in Dallas. Another, "War Stories," was broadcast on WFAA-TV,

and has won a regional Emmy Award, the National Headliners Award for Best TV Documentary, and the Edward R. Murrow Award from the Radio-Television News Directors Association for Best News Documentary.

The Alumnus of the Year Award from his alma mater, however, means a lot too.

"It's a terrific honor. My immediate reaction was, 'So many other people could receive this. Why me?' I haven't accomplished nearly what I hoped to in my life. I have fallen short of my personal goals for some time," he said. "But I am really appreciative. I recognize what a high honor it is, but I never thought such a thing could happen to me. It feels good. It's up there with the Pulitzer in my book, that's for sure."

John Best, general manager of KACU-FM and adjunct instructor of journalism and mass communication at ACU, was Leeson's

first photo editor at the *Reporter-News*.

"David was one of those people who went beyond the expected," Best said. "He also was the hardest person on photo equipment I've ever seen in my life. But he has the innate ability to look through a lens – a 24x36mm frame – and see the shape of things as well as the content, and then translate that to an image that communicates."

"Part of it can be learned," Best said. "The rest is a gift from God."

"I'm in a new place in my life," said Leeson, whose daughter, Lauren is an ACU student. "I have told the *Morning News* that I am not going to go back to what I was doing 20 years ago. We all have a mission in life; we all can make a difference. You don't have to have a camera around your neck to make a difference in life. Ultimately, your personal life is a reflection of the evidence of God within you, or the lack thereof."

"I tell people all the time: It's a wonderful thing to be 47 years old and be able to say, 'I was used by God. It was not what I wanted to do but what He wanted to do.'"

"And don't think for a minute that a Christian education doesn't help establish that fundamental concept in your life."▲

– RON HADFIELD

Brandon Scott Thomas



GERALD EWING

“I never could have imagined this.”
Speaking from his office at Otter Creek Church of Christ in Nashville, **Brandon Scott Thomas** ('92) still finds the blessings in his life difficult to grasp.

In the nine years he has served as worship minister at Otter Creek, Thomas has become a husband, father, and the leader of The ZOE Group, a worship resource group he helped start in 1995. He has sung on numerous recordings for Nashville record labels and has performed twice with Michael W. Smith and CeCe Winans for “Gathering,” a city-wide worship celebration in Nashville.

And most recently, Thomas received ACU’s Young Alumnus of the Year Award.

“I was blown away. I was really honored,” Thomas says, recalling the day ACU president Dr. Royce Money ('64) called to inform him of the honor.

Born in Abilene to Sam ('56) and Judy (Brandon '61) Thomas, Thomas was involved at ACU long before he was a student there. As a grade-schooler, he performed in “The Music Man” and “Shenandoah,” as well as some children’s theatre productions.

“I was performing from third grade,” he says.

By the time Thomas arrived on campus as a freshman in fall 1988, it was only natural that he

get involved in some form of music and performing. He joined Daybreak, Take One and Reflections – singing groups that traveled and performed on behalf of the university. Thomas didn’t realize it at the time, but he was learning skills that would later help transform him into a music minister.

“Doing Take One and that kind of thing really helped me,” he says.

Immersing himself in campus activities, Thomas worked in student government, pledged Gamma Sigma Phi and joined the A Club and the Choral Society. After performing as a Sing Song host in 1991, and leading the Gamma Sigs to a Sing Song sweepstakes victory in 1992, Thomas began

servicing as a worship and university ministry intern at Highland Church of Christ in Abilene. There, Thomas worked with pulpit minister Mike Cope.

“Mike was the one who eventually said, “You should think about doing music ministry,” Thomas says.

Cope remembers noticing Thomas’ unique talent. “He was incredibly gifted in a way that you can’t train someone,” Cope says.

After graduating from ACU with a communication degree in 1992, Thomas sang in shows at Six Flags Over Texas and for the Norwegian Cruise Line before joining the staff at Otter Creek as worship minister in 1995.

Not long after Thomas arrived at Otter Creek, he began meeting with a group of people on Saturday mornings to discuss worship renewal. Out of these meetings came The ZOE Group, Inc., a not-for-profit Christian ministry dedicated to worship renewal. With Thomas as its producer and worship leader, ZOE has produced seven independent record

releases and three nationally distributed releases through the Creative Trust and Provident record labels. ZOE was the first a cappella group to be featured on Worship Leader Magazine’s

Song DISCOVERY, a worship leaders’ resource for new worship music.

More than just a singing group, ZOE offers worship resources through seminars, recordings, publications, Internet communications and the ZOE Worship Conference, which is organized and led by Thomas each fall.

Taking the conference on the road throughout the year, ZOE teams up with Cope to lead worship and promote worship renewal at

churches and university lectureships.

“The ZOE Group provides resources to help God’s people improve in the discipline of worship,” says The ZOE Group Web site at zoegroup.faithsite.com. “It is our prayer that excellence in the worship experience can be enhanced and improved, practiced and taught.”

In 1998, Thomas married Sheryl (Rathbun, '94), also a singer with ZOE, and they have two children: Maddie, 3, and Ella, 1.

Thomas says he has seen a lot of changes in the nine years he has been at Otter Creek. The congregation has more than doubled during that time.

“If you build a ministry where people can use their gifts, you will attract people with gifts,” Thomas says.

And Thomas’ personal ministry isn’t just about music. He works with the Operation Andrew Group, which promotes racial and denominational reconciliation in Greater Nashville.

“We have a city-wide worship service once a year and various activities each month for ministers of Nashville churches,” he says.

He also volunteers at the Otter Creek-directed Wayne Reed Inner City Daycare, where he reads, sings and prays with children.

A voting member of the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences for the annual Grammy Awards, Thomas also has performed on numerous recordings for Nashville record labels, including two Dove Award-nominated albums.

He never dreamed God would lead him here, and he’s eager to see what lies ahead.

“I’m just going to keep walking through doors as God opens them,” he said. “I want to continue being helpful and relevant.” ▲

– DEANA NALL

“It is our prayer
that excellence in the
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– BRANDON SCOTT THOMAS



Mary Hollingsworth



For Christian author **Mary (Shrode '70) Hollingsworth**, creating stories comes as naturally as, well, naps to a child.

"As a preschooler, I was coaxed into taking

a nap by my Mom, who took turns with me making up stories and telling them to each other," recalls the Distinguished Alumni recipient. "I'm sure Mom had no idea what long-range impact that little creative ritual would have on me."

That "little ritual" helped inspire Hollingsworth to write more than 80 Christian adult, inspirational, and children's books, including bestsellers "Hugs for Women," "Hugs for Kids" (Howard Publishing), and "My Little Bible" (Tommy Nelson), and her latest book, "Love Notes from God" (Tyndale House).

Still, Hollingsworth did not consider a career in writing until after receiving a bachelor's degree in business education at ACU.

"One of the things that got me really interested in writing for a career was working for The Optimist," says Hollingsworth, who wrote feature articles for the ACU student newspaper. In fact, after receiving her undergraduate degree, Mary decided to pursue a master's degree in journalism and communication.

In a meeting with Dr. Rex Kyker, her graduate advisor, about whether she would write a thesis or take additional hours to complete the degree, "he said, 'Oh, no, Mary, you need to write a thesis because you're going to be a writer.' ... At the time I'd never given any thought to the possibility of writing as a career ... That one statement really stuck in my mind. It would come back to me and come back to me. I'm sure that was the Lord prompting me to move in the direction He wanted me to go."

A year later Hollingsworth landed a job as a writer on the personal staff of oil billionaire H.L. Hunt in Dallas. She served as one of the writers of his syndicated column, "Hunt for Truth," and wrote scripts for Hunt's Lifeline radio program, narrated by Melvin Munn.

Hollingsworth's entree into the book publishing business came in 1975. While living in Pittsburgh, Penn., she created a collection of 100 bulletin board ideas for Bible school teachers titled, "Help! I Need a Bulletin Board." Thirty years later, the book is still in print by Quality Publications.

In 1983 Hollingsworth returned to the Dallas and Fort Worth area and began freelancing for Sweet Publishing Co., where she was subsequently hired as the managing editor of TEACH, a newsletter for Bible school teachers and church leaders. At Sweet, she reunited with ACU colleague Carol Bartley ('69), then Sweet's executive editor, and joined a team working on the first translation of the Bible for children. The "International Children's Bible" (not "Story" Bible) became a popular book and led to an adult translation known as the New Century Version.

While at Sweet, Hollingsworth wrote several children's and gift books, including her first bestseller, "Just Between Friends" (Brownlow Publishing). In 1988 she left Sweet to write books full time on a freelance basis. Since then, Hollingsworth has produced books at a rate of five to six a year [see www.maryhollingsworth.com]. For the past eight years she also has served as a managing editor for the W Publishing Group, a division of Thomas Nelson Inc. in Nashville.

"It has really been fun to watch her writing career take off," says Bartley, now a freelance production editor in Christian publishing. Bartley remembers that when Hollingsworth decided to go out on her own, she submitted numerous proposals to publishers. "She got a record number of acceptances in just no time. I mean, God had His hand all over it. He confirmed for her right away that there was an audience for her writing and not just by one publisher, but by several."

The ideas for her books, Hollingsworth says, pervade her life. "Anything I see or hear is potentially an idea for a book," she said. "It's part of the gift that God gave me – the ability to see potential books." She keeps an idea book, which is filled with ideas that could be developed into books in the future.

"We'll drive down the highway, and she'll come up with the name for a new book," says Charlotte Greeson, Hollingsworth's best friend and housemate. "She'll write it down and put it in this notebook.

Maybe six or seven years later she'll write a book and say, 'You know, I think I've got a title for this book.'"

In addition to a house, Greeson and Hollingsworth share another interest – music. Their friendship began in 1985 when Mary joined the Richland Hills Family Singers, the music outreach ministry of Richland Hills Church of Christ. Hollingsworth and Greeson served as co-leaders of the ministry for 17 years.

"[The chorus] was a ground-breaking group," Hollingsworth says. The Singers were well known for their a cappella musical dramas, which for 12 years Hollingsworth and Greeson collaborated to write – Hollingsworth the scripts and Greeson the music. The group traveled to foreign countries presenting concerts at smaller Churches of Christ to draw people from the communities into the churches. It also has performed at various events throughout the country.

"When Mary and Charlotte got involved, the professionalism of the group just took a quantum leap," says Bartley, who attends Richland Hills. "It wouldn't have been able to accomplish what it has, had those two not lent untold hours of writing music and plays."

Greeson, a professional musician and music teacher, says that Hollingsworth learned many songs from her father's close friend, Tillit S. Teddlie, composer of many well-known Christian songs.

"When she was little, she used to sing herself to sleep. She said, 'I would sing and sing and sing, and finally Mother or Daddy would say, 'OK, Mary, one more verse, and then you need to go to sleep.'"

For Mary Hollingsworth, another childhood ritual pays off. ▲

– TAMARA THOMPSON



Bob Allen



KEN ROBERTS

The first time **Bob Allen** led singing at the small church in his hometown of Sanderson, Texas, he held the songbook upside down. He wasn't old enough to read.

He's been reminded several times of that faux pas, but Robert N. (Bob) Allen III ('70) hasn't made many mistakes since. He graduated from Sanderson High School in 1966, received a business degree from Abilene Christian University, and now directs a multi-million-dollar, privately-held company with offices in five cities in Texas.

His surprise at being selected for a Distinguished Alumni Citation from ACU became reality Oct. 10 when president Dr. Royce Money ('64) presented Allen with his award at Highland Church of Christ.

"I was surprised, but I was pleased," Allen, a member of a longtime ACU family, said. "Why would they pick me? I couldn't imagine who would recommend me for such an honor."

Allen is president of Associated Publishing Co., an independent telephone directory publishing company with offices in Abilene, Midland, Bryan-College Station, San Angelo and Laredo. After beginning his career as an accountant at West Texas Central Council of Governments and then serving as controller at Davis, Kinard and Co., he became CFO at Associated Publishing in 1985 when it had 10 employees and less than \$1 million in annual sales.

A former business associate convinced Allen to join the APC staff. Allen admits he was skeptical at first. "Why do we need another phone book?" he asked. "We already have one. But over time the business, and competing with Southwestern Bell, began to make sense, and we began to turn the company's performance around. At the time it was a fledgling industry, and we were all learning from scratch."

He was promoted to vice president of operations and to president in 1994, the same year APC was sold to New York-based Hearst Corp., one of the nation's largest diversified communications companies. Today APC has about 110 employees and \$22 million in annual sales and recently observed its 10th anniversary with Hearst.

The APC president sees his work as a ministry "in the way we treat our people, employees and

customers. We encourage our employees and celebrate with them. We go overboard sometimes in recognizing them. We believe every decision has to benefit the customer, our employees and the company."

Allen added, "Early on in life, you're just doing a job, just getting by. But I began to realize there's more to it than that. Like successful football coaches, I want to energize people. I believe in empowerment. I'm not a controlling person. People learn from their mistakes. A good leader has to position people to succeed individually."

Allen said, "My known career options coming out of Sanderson" were ranching, working for the railroad, or coaching.

He enrolled at Abilene Christian as an agriculture major, then progressed to agri-business before settling on general business as a major and receiving a B.S. degree in 1970. "I had a love for the land, the same love my father had," Allen said, "but business became something I had better skills for."

Allen readily remembers studying at Abilene Christian with agriculture professors Dr. Keith Justice and Dr. Edwin DuBose and learning accounting in class under Don Drennan. "I still have memories of Dr. Overton Faubus (professor emeritus of accounting in the College of Business Administration). He was a strong influence on me. He was a man of God in addition to the technical skills he taught me."

Allen worked on the family ranch near Sanderson on weekends and during the summers with his father, Robert N. Allen Jr., and lived during the school year in town where his mother, the late Allene Brooks Allen, worked at the bank.

His high school graduating class had 33 members. "Everybody played football and other sports or we didn't have a team," he said. "I also played in the band and led singing at church. There were definite advantages to growing up in a small church. There were lots of leadership opportunities."

Allen's father was an area representative for Medina Children's Home and Lubbock Christian

University, and his sister first attended Lubbock Christian before graduating from ACU. But Allen decided Abilene Christian was the college for him.

"It was more established at the time, and it appealed to me," Allen remembers. "I had visited the campus many times for Homecoming, musicals and other events."

He's a grand nephew of the late G.A. "Guy" ('27) and Bess (Allen '27) Scuggs, for whom Scuggs Gymnasium is named, and he's a cousin of Jeannette (Scuggs '49) Lipford, assistant professor emerita of voice.

And there are many other family connections to the university. His grandfather, Samuel Norton Allen, donated what is now the Allen Farm to ACU.

The Allen family was honored by Abilene Christian in 1978 as the university's Generation Family.

Allen is married to Janice Fogle, a graduate of Abilene Cooper High School and Texas Tech. Their son, Robbie ('03), is a communications graduate of Abilene Christian now working in Dallas; son Bryson is a sophomore at ACU; and son Christopher is a junior at Wylie High School.

Allen currently works with the youth and family ministry and is an elder at Highland, where he also has served in administration, budget and finance, and children's ministry.

He's also active in the Abilene community, including service with Hendrick Medical Center Foundation (board vice chair and secretary), Abilene Cultural Affairs Council (vice chair and treasurer), Boy Scouts, National Center for Children's Literature, and Abilene Chamber of Commerce.

Allen has also been treasurer of United Way of Abilene, president of Key City Kiwanis, and board chair for Christian Homes of Abilene.

He was named "Boss of the Year" in 1995 by the Abilene Business Women's Association, and now he's a worthy recipient of a Distinguished Alumni Citation from his alma mater. Bob Allen has come a long way from that upside-down songbook.▲

— GARNER ROBERTS



Dr. Stan Denman

As an ACU student, Dr. Stan Denman ('86) knew exactly what he wanted to do. The theatre major approached Adam Hester ('77), then assistant professor of theatre, and said, "My dream

is to have a job like yours one day."

Fulfilling a sort of double prophecy, Denman does have a job like Hester's. Both men are now chairs of theatre departments at major private universities in the Southwest – Denman at Baylor University and Hester at ACU.

"Of course he's a gifted actor," Hester said of his former student, the Distinguished Alumni Citation recipient for the College of Arts and Sciences. "But he also has a lot of drive."

Denman's ambition is evident just from the year he's had. In addition to the honor from ACU, Denman also has received a \$3,000 grant from Baylor to research and adapt Henrik Ibsen's

"The Lady from the Sea." And he gained entrance into the professional Actor's Equity Association – something only two other Baylor performance faculty members have achieved in 40 years.

Also an accomplished playwright, Denman's passion for the stage sometimes causes him to forget that his dream job has become a reality. "There are times when I'm acting or directing and I stop and think, 'They are paying me to do this.'" he said.

Immersing himself in theatre while at ACU, Denman played roles in "Seven Brides for Seven Brothers" and "Fiddler on the Roof" – both Homecoming musicals. He also performed as a Sing Song host and in Summerstage productions.

"I really didn't realize how much I had learned from ACU," he said. "The quality of productions there was really high."

Denman was so busy developing a passion for theatre that he even got into a little trouble. To get more directing experience, he and two other theatre majors decided to put on their own production.

They each contributed \$60 and rehearsed in Cullen Auditorium when the building wasn't in use.

"We were just too dumb and naive to know we needed to ask permission," he said. "We just thought, 'Hey, the building is empty, and they said we could use it.'"

When an article in the Abilene Reporter-News called the play an "unofficial production" of ACU, their cover was blown.

"We kind of got our hands slapped," he said.

After graduation, Denman married a fellow theatre major, Lisa (Cole '88), and went on to complete a master's in theatre arts at Baylor.

Eventually earning a Ph.D. from the University of Pittsburgh, Stan settled in with Lisa in Waco, where he joined the Baylor faculty as a lecturer in 1992. He became assistant professor in 1998, and became theatre department chair in 2002 after serving as acting chair for two years.

As a Christian professor of theatre, Denman sometimes has the chance to counter the criticism that Christians should not mix with the entertainment world.

"God needs Christian artists to give us stories of hope and stories that point us to God," Denman argues. He also counsels his students to change their thinking about how to guard their faith as performers.

"So many freshmen go into it thinking, 'What will I do or not do?'" he said. "Of course there are ethical decisions, but they should be thinking, 'As a Christian, what will my life's work say?' Once they do that, their artistry is mission-driven."

One of Denman's greatest honors at Baylor has been serving as executive director and co-founder of the Horton Foote American Playwrights Festival. In March 2004, 86-year-old Foote, now on Baylor's theatre department staff as a distinguished visiting dramatist, served as the artistic advisor on the department's production



of his play "The Traveling Lady."

Getting to work with Foote, a Texas native whose 60-year career has garnered Oscar and Emmy awards and a Pulitzer Prize, was thrilling for Denman – and a little nerve-wracking.

"I had to audition for him in his apartment in Manhattan," Denman said. "It was the first time I had acted in seven years. I was a nervous wreck."

Foote even revised the play during production.

"He came to every single rehearsal," Denman said. "That was so much fun – getting to work with this legendary playwright."

Reminiscent of his ACU days, Denman still enjoys taking a risk. In 2002, he directed "The Oresteia," a 2,500-year-old drama. On opening night, he was unsure of how well the two-and-a-half-hour classical production would be received.

"I was terrified the entire time," he said.

After the show, Denman was relieved to see that no one in the audience had left. "It really showed me that if you do a quality production, people will come," he said.

Although Denman's schedule is loaded with teaching, directing, playwriting, writing for scholarly publications and serving on a host of professional associations and committees, his life is not limited to the stage. He and Lisa – a part-time theatre instructor at Baylor – attend Robinson Church of Christ, where he serves as a deacon and a small group Bible study leader.

His involvement in the community includes writing and directing Waco's annual Cotton Palace Pageant, collecting for Mission Waco school supply and food drives, and coordinating Coat Day, when more than 10,000 articles of clothing are distributed to needy families.

For Denman, Lisa and their two daughters, the Christian life isn't limited to Sundays and Wednesdays.

"Our focus is to put into practice what we've been taught," he said. ▲

"God needs Christian artists to give us stories of hope and stories that point us to God."

– DR. STAN DENMAN

– DEANA NALL



Steven Kenney



If Stephen Kenney ('86) hadn't drawn a blank at the library that day, he could be filling his schedule with patients and prescriptions instead of litigation.

Kenney, 2004 Distinguished Alumni Citation recipient from the College of Biblical Studies, had devoted several years to figuring out what to do with his life.

He had earned a missions degree from ACU and had been preaching in Juneau, Alaska, for a couple of years. Wanting a career that would provide health insurance for his family, he had finally decided upon medical school. So he walked into the Juneau library to study for the MCAT.

"I'm here to pick up the..." Kenney froze. He couldn't think of the word "MCAT."

The librarian smiled.

"Oh, you procrastinators," she said. "Always waiting until the last minute to study for the LSAT."

"I thought, 'The LSAT. OK,'" said Kenney, who eventually became an assistant public prosecutor for Kanawha County, W.Va. "It's not the greatest of stories."

Some might argue with that. Kenney, who has served as a statewide special prosecutor for violent crimes and drugs in West Virginia, is considered an expert on child sexual abuse through his work as a county prosecutor.

He also is a national speaker on continuing legal education, DNA evidence, white-collar crimes and police training. Not many attorneys with Kenney's track record entered law school on a lark.

And even fewer would choose to pursue such a seemingly unrelated vocation on the side. On Sundays, Kenney does what he considers to be his most important work. He preaches for the Hurricane Church of Christ in Hurricane, W.Va., where he lives with his wife Leslie, teen-aged children Jane Ann, Erin and Scott, and Vietnamese exchange student Queen Do.

"I see a great synergy between the two jobs," he said. "I think being a student of the Bible helps me be a lawyer."

Holding a bachelor's in missions from ACU and a J.D. from the University of Pittsburgh, Kenney had once planned on skipping college altogether.

"I started out being very antagonistic toward higher education," he said. "It seemed to me that everyone who went to college lost their faith."

After a six-month job preaching for a small church in Tennessee after high school, Kenney entered Ohio State University, where he met and married Leslie Fogel in 1983. While attending a Marriage Enrichment Seminar taught by Drs. Paul Faulkner ('52) and Carl Brecheen ('52), Kenney turned to Leslie and said, "Let's transfer to ACU."

Entering ACU as a missions major, Kenney was taught by Bible professors Dr. John Willis ('55) and Dr. David Wray ('67), and missions professors Les Bennett (M.Miss '83) and Gaston Tarbet (M.A. '63).

"Leslie and I talk about ACU as being the best years of our lives," Kenney said.

After graduation, the Kennys wanted to serve as missionaries in Kenya, but were unable to raise the support. Instead, Kenney took a preaching job in Juneau. Although he wasn't getting to serve in another country as he had planned, his missions degree was proving useful.

"The cross-cultural skills came into play in Juneau," he said.

Then came the fateful day in the library, which Kenney now believes was God intervening in his life plans.

"I said, 'Oh, OK, I hear you,'" he said.

And Kenney believes his missions degree laid the groundwork for his career as a lawyer.

"The missions degree is a fabulous pre-law degree," Kenney said.

Having learned as a missions major to take a message and put it effectively into another culture, Kenney uses this training in the courtroom every day.

"Concepts are bigger than language. An idea is always bigger than what it is we're trying to say," he said.

Since becoming an attorney, Kenney has clerked in the Pennsylvania state appellate court and has worked in civil practice with small and mid-sized firms as well as on his own. As county prosecutor,

Kenney has targeted child sexual offenders, putting one man away for life for crimes that had eluded law enforcement officers for years.

"Stephen would never, never brag or glorify himself in any of these endeavors," wrote Leslie Kenney when nominating her husband for the alumni award. "He does not seek the spotlight, but he has worked incredibly hard to change the world for good by ministering to children and parents torn by sexual abuse, parents of murder victims and numerous others," she wrote.

And while many attorneys give in to the materialism their careers can afford them, Kenney has resisted the urge to become money-driven.

"He obviously has the heart of a servant," said Linda (Watkins '72) Giddens, president of the ACU Alumni Association. "In a career that could be very lucrative, he has chosen to change the world by ministering to those who have been victims of the worst kind of evil that can happen in this imperfect world."

One such victim was the mother of J.R. Warren, a young man who was brutally murdered several years ago. Kenney prosecuted the case, which was featured on ABC's "20/20." After the jury ruled in favor of the prosecution, the victim's mother delivered a victim impact statement during the sentencing hearing.

"She said, 'You killed somebody. It's an awful thing you did, but you can still give your life over to Jesus Christ,'" Kenney said.

These moments, the ones in which the minister is ministered to, are crucial to Kenney remaining optimistic in a career that drives many lawyers to cynicism. He also maintains a realistic view of the justice system.

"Law is not the greatest good. If it were, Jesus would not have needed to come here," he said. "We dispense imperfect justice." ▲

— DEANA NALL